ELLERY QUEEN

THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

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This message is one in a series from America's magazines.

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THE WORLD'S LEADING MYSTERY MAGAZINE

ELLERY QUEEN ®

6 **Death in the Christmas Hour** / James Powell
21 **The Hallucination** / Florence V. Mayberry
30 **Shaggy Dog Story** / Geoffrey Shires
31 **Figures** / Bill Mitchell
40 **The Paranoid Club** / A. J. Vogl
46 **Only the Beginning** / William Bankier
62 **A Somewhat Happy Ending** / Robert Twohy
78 **Inspector Saito and the Twenty-Sen Stamp** / Janwillem van de Wetering
94 **Little Old Lady Passing By** / Jean Bowden
107 **A Piece of Cake** / Christianna Brand
114 **Curses** / Carol Clemeau
131 **Changing Neighborhoods** / Jeffry Scott
140 **The Cat and Fiddle Murders** / Edward D. Hoch

69 **Mystery Newsletter** / R. E. Porter & Chris Steinbrunner
75 **The Jury Box** / Jon L. Breen

Note: indicia on last page

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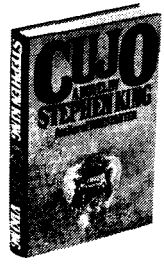

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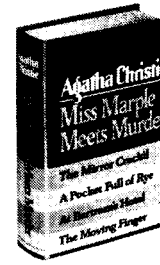

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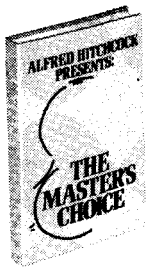

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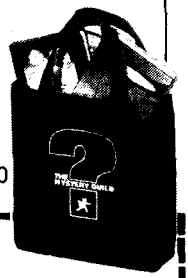

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Half the good ideas humans get come from their toys. Teddy didn't know where the other half came from . . .

Our holiday gift to detective-story lovers of all ages, and a delightful one if we do say so ourselves. Unravel and enjoy . . .

DEATH IN THE CHRISTMAS HOUR

by JAMES POWELL

In the first hour of Christmas morning animals can talk and toys come to life provided no humans are lurking about.

Several minutes after the last stroke of midnight had tolled over the snowy Christmas city, a Welsh corgi named Owen Glendower could be seen leading a young man on a leash past the houseware windows of McTammany's Department Store.

Austin W. Metcalfe, as this young person called himself, possessed a round face cluttered with glasses and a short-stemmed, fat-bowled pipe whose operation he had not yet mastered. A burgundy muffler was tucked up neatly under his chin. His hands and feet were warm in fleece-lined leather. Every button of his dark-blue overcoat was buttoned. He moved with a sedate and serious air, having by dint of application and high purpose risen to be second assistant curator of the Metropolitan Museum of Toys.

In other words—as Owen Glendower would be the first to admit—Metcalfe was a very, very pompous young ass. The dog looked back over its shoulder as if about to unload a considerable burden of complaint. Poor square Metcalfe really needed his corners knocked off. The dog hoped some girl would come along crazy enough to take

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a liking to him and do the job before it was too late. Recently Metcalfe had met one who seemed to fit the bill. Owen Glendower had used his considerable powers of thought transference to inspire a phone call. (Half the good ideas humans get come from their pets. Owen Glendower didn't know where the other half came from.) But the young stick-in-the-mud wouldn't budge. The dog turned to mutter at a hydrant.

Though the wind was picking up, Metcalfe waited patiently in the falling snow, conscious of being a kindly and, he was sure, a beloved master. He'd have enjoyed dwelling on that but his pipe went out again and he had to struggle to relight it.

Meanwhile, around the corner and just ten feet from where he stood, the occupants of the largest of McTammany's toy windows were enjoying a fashion show. The Dick and Jane dolls were displaying their extensive wardrobes to an appreciative audience of frogs in frill collars, sows in dresses, and a variety of robots, those metal facsimiles of humanity who beeped, hummed, and flashed their approval in the most amazing manner considering that batteries were not included.

When Owen Glendower was ready, he coughed to warn the toys to freeze in their tracks and then led the young man around the corner so the whole window could see what an honest corgi had to put up with all year long. As for Metcalfe, he'd seen the window many times before. The museum had loaned its popular toy display and the young man's personal creation, "A Victorian Christmas," to McTammany's for the holidays. Metcalfe came daily to admire his handiwork on exhibit in the next window. But he always stopped here first. The antique toys never suffered from the comparison.

Unwilling to interrupt the toys' Christmas Hour any longer, Owen Glendower coughed again and led the way to Metcalfe's window. The young man's design represented a Victorian living room centering on a small alabaster fireplace. To its left stood a Christmas tree hung with brightly painted wooden ornaments and topped by a caroling angel.

Before the tree was a music-box ballerina on tiptoe and a blue-and-yellow jack-in-the-box. On the hearth rug stood a Punch and Judy show with two fine hand puppets. The right of the fireplace was occupied by a grass-green wing chair and a matching hassock topped with a most elegant Victorian dollhouse whose porcelain mistress stood at the door in a plum-colored hoop shirt. At the base of the hassock a nutcracker captain of hussars with fierce grin and

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drawn saber led a formation of toy soldiers in scarlet coats and bearskin hats.

Rather, that was how Metcalfe had laid out the exhibit. But tonight someone else's hand had been at work. The soldiers were nowhere to be seen. The hussar and the rest of the toys stood in a circle in front of the jack-in-the-box looking down at Judy, lying on the red Turkey carpet, a limp and strangely lifeless figure looking somehow less than a hand puppet without a hand in it.

And there was more uncanniness. The jack-in-the-box was out and nodding on its spring. But traffic vibrations sometimes triggered the box latch. And the hussar seemed atremble as though it had just snapped to attention. Still, that might have been Metcalfe's imagination. But where did that Sherlock Holmes doll come from? And why did Metcalfe have the distinct impression the little detective was on the verge of pointing an accusing finger?

Then he saw the teddy bear at Holmes' side and the light dawned. Miss Tinker, a department-store window dresser who'd helped him set up the museum display, said she always put her Teddy in one of the toy windows and please couldn't she sit him there on the wing chair? Well, Metcalfe'd had to laugh at that and explain how every toy, ornament, and piece of furniture in the display was an authentic Victorian artifact. Teddy bears were Edwardian. With bad grace she had accepted his compromise that she wrap up the bear and put it under the tree where more presents were needed. Why, he wondered, were the pretty ones all so feather-headed?

On the other hand, he hadn't been completely honest with her. The museum didn't have a Victorian Christmas-tree angel. Mr. Jacoby, their toy repair and reproduction wizard, had fashioned this one from parts of an Amelia Earhart doll damaged when the wire that held its monoplane to the ceiling above the Toys Conquer the Clouds display had broken. Metcalfe'd been tempted to call her up and confess. Now he was rather glad he hadn't. A Sherlock Holmes doll, indeed! Metcalfe relit his pipe and rocked back and forth on his heels, puffing with his hands clasped behind his back. Yes, he would definitely have to speak to the young lady about this. And about how the teddy bear got there, too.

Metcalfe might have stayed for some time, fuming, imagining his righteousness at this confrontation, but Owen Glendower gave a sigh of tedium and led him away, knowing that Mr. Metropolitan, the generous Armenian who was the museum's director and principal endower, had asked his second assistant curator to make an

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early-morning visit to the toy reliquary at the museum. Last Christmas morning the night watchman had reported discovering three dead alligators in a pool of blood in the Victorian Wing.

Asked to produce the carcasses, the man insisted he'd burned them in the furnace after cleaning up the mess. Asked to explain the disappearance of one of the finest of the Victorian dolls, the night watchman had professed ignorance. Metcalfe had been commissioned to drop in and smell the night watchman's breath to determine, as Mr. Metropolitan put it, "if the man's on the Christmas sauce."

As for where Teddy came from, the answer was the Midwest. Miss Ivy Tinker had brought him with her as a mascot when she moved East to take the job with McTammany's. For Teddy, mascoting was a kind of lonely, fallow time, waiting for Miss Ivy Tinker to get married and have children so he could get back to toying again. Teddy had spent his first Christmas Hour here in the East alone, pacing up and down with his paws in his pockets and nothing to do but kick at a corner of the rug.

To insure that wouldn't happen again, he had furrowed his brow and directed his powers of thought transference at Miss Ivy Tinker's sleeping head behind the bedroom door. The next morning over toast she announced that she'd dreamed she'd included him in one of her Christmas toy windows. And why not? The perfect cachet for a Tinker-dressed window. The stuffed bear wasn't surprised a bit. Half the good ideas humans get come from their toys. Teddy didn't know where the other half came from.

Teddy hadn't spent a boring Christmas Hour since. Last year he'd been right in the middle of McTammany's stuffed-animal window. On the stroke of midnight, in clopped the team of stuffed Clydesdales, the kangaroo pulled the spigot out of his pouch and told the old one about Australian beer being made out of kangaroo hops, and a great time'd been had by all. Teddy'd worn a hangover and a lopsided grin for the rest of the year.

And now it was the Christmas Hour again. Stretching at the first rush of vital power, Teddy felt the noisy paper and some constricting bond. His paw found the seam in the wrapping, located the end of the velvet bow, and pulled. With the toll of midnight sounding dimly in the distance, he emerged and found himself standing among a pile of presents under a Christmas tree. Farther out in the room he

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could see other toys coming to life. He was just about to join them when the sound of a muffled violin made him stop.

He lay his ear to the gay boxes one by one until he found the source. He stripped back the paper. The lid illustration on the box depicted night and fog and a doorway from another era. The number on the door was 221B. The name on the lamppost was Baker Street. Large bright letters declared: THE ORIGINAL SHERLOCK HOLMES DOLL. ANOTHER WONDERFUL CREATION FROM DOYLE TOYS.

Teddy opened the box. The doll inside wore a deerstalker cap and a coat with a cape. In addition to its violin and bow, which the doll lay aside with a smile, the other accessories included a magnifying glass, a calabash pipe, and a Persian slipper stuffed with shag.

"Thank you, my dear sir," said Sherlock Holmes, taking Teddy's proffered paw to help himself out of the box. "I've spent I don't know how many Christmases wedged down behind a radiator in the toy-department stockroom. I'm the sole survivor of an unpopular and long-forgotten line of dolls. I don't know whom to thank for being here."

"Miss Ivy Tinker needed more boxes for under the tree," said Teddy, introducing himself.

"Ursus arctus Rooseveltii? I hardly think so," said the detective. "And I did publish an anonymous monograph on stuffed animals." Reaching for his glass, he examined Teddy's eyes and the seam on his shoulder. "Your eyes are French glass manufactured by Homard et Fils. Your seams are a double stitch called English nightingale because, like that bird, it is only found in England east of the Severn and south of the Trent.

"Homard et Fils supplied only one company in that area, Tiddicomb and Weams. That firm produced stuffed bears only once. On the birth of Queen Victoria's son, Prince Leopold, in 1854, Tiddicomb and Weams presented the child with a papier-mâché replica of the House of Lords, complete with twelve stuffed bears dressed in stars and garters and full pontificals to represent the lords spiritual and temporal. This wonderful toy the teenaged prince later donated to an auction in aid of the victims of the great Chicago fire and it disappeared from sight in America. You, Teddy, are a Bear of the Realm."

Teddy's chest swelled with pride and his voice grew husky. "I believed it when Miss Ivy Tinker said I was a teddy bear. We stuffed animals are notoriously absent-minded."

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"Well, come along, old fellow," said Holmes, taking his arm. "It's the Christmas Hour. The game's afoot. Time to wrap ourselves around a good stiff drink."

Teddy needed no urging. They strolled from under the tree together, walking to the beat of the carol being sung by the silver-voiced angel atop the tree—who, in the nature of Christmas-tree angels, preferred to spend the hour singing hymns of joy and praise.

Suddenly a captain of hussars blocked their way, a dozen redcoats at his back. The officer raised a suspicious eyebrow at Teddy and lay the point of his saber against his hairy breast. "Well, you ain't no alligator but you could be a rat in disguise," said the hussar, gnashing his teeth in a most threatening manner.

Teddy knocked the saber aside and growled as a Bear of the Realm might. "What I am is a bear."

Impressed by this lack of meekness, the officer said, "You mean one of those stuffed-animal chappies? Then welcome aboard. Captain Rataplan here. We can use anyone with spunk enough to stand beside us in this damned business."

"And just what business is that, Captain?" asked Holmes.

"Let's save that for over a drink once we've got the perimeter secure," said the hussar. "I see old Punch has opened for business."

Holmes followed the officer's finger over to the hearth rug where the two hand puppets were converting their stage into a bar, Punch polishing the counter with a rag while Judy set up the bottles and glasses.

But Teddy's gaze couldn't get past the music-box ballerina only a few feet away. She had the dancer's classic features, small head, large eyes, and long legs. Teddy tried to catch her attention by wiggling his ears. "A fine figure of a woman," agreed Captain Rataplan. "That's Allegretta. Gretta, we call her. Likes to play hard to get, don't you know. Well, I don't mind that in a woman. Faint heart ne'er won fair lady, eh?" He snorted fiercely and marched his men away.

Holmes and Teddy headed off across the carpet in the direction of the bar. As they passed the closed jack-in-the-box, Holmes remarked, "Jack seems to be a slug-a-bed."

Then they stopped and introduced themselves to the ballerina, who sat nursing a foot in her lap. "Come and join us for a drink," urged Teddy, wiggling his ears outrageously. "Tempus fugit."

"I'll be right along, okay?" she said through chewing gum. "Boy, are my dogs barking."

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"After a year on tiptoe, dogs that didn't bark would be quite a clue indeed," observed Holmes with a smile which she answered with a blank stare.

At the bar Punch greeted them with a "What'll it be, gents?" in a squeaking batlike voice.

"Something with a splash of the old gasogene, Landlord, if you please," said Holmes. "A scotch whisky, I think."

"Make mine a gibson," said Teddy. The cocktail vice had spread quickly among creatures who only came to life one hour a year.

"So be it, gents," said Punch. But as the hunchback reached for the scotch he shouted over his shoulder, "Judy, where are you off to?"

"The olives," squeaked his female partner.

"Onions for gibsons, old hoss," scolded Punch. He mixed their drinks and when Judy came back from the icebox carrying a pickled onion on the point of an ice pick he served them. "Your health, gents," he declared, raising his own mug of beer. As they clinked their drinks, Punch turned once again to Judy and demanded, "Where now, old hoss?"

"An olive," she said, waving the ice pick. "Here comes Captain Rataplan for his martooni."

But the hussar heard her and shook his head. "My men come first. Twelve mugs of the nut-brown ale." Judy put the ice pick in the pocket of her smock and obediently set to filling the mugs.

Turning to Holmes and his bear companion, Captain Rataplan said, "Getting back to the alligator situation, the damned things feed on sewer rats all year round. So come Christmas Hour we're a delicious change of pace and they swarm up and make a try for us. No problem. We can give as good as we get. And alligators are a stupid, muscle-bound crew.

"But then there are the rats. Cowards, but smart as whips. Gentlemen, one of these years the rats are going to talk the alligators into an alliance. What I see coming against us is an army of alligators each with a rat riding on its neck whispering orders in its ear. Mark my words, when that day dawns toydom will vanish from human memory and dogs and cats won't be far behind."

"A grim prospect, Captain," said Holmes gravely. "Let's hope the rats never get the idea."

But as Rataplan left with his mugs of ale on a tray, some of the gloom went with him. After a few pulls at his drink, Holmes leaned back with his elbows on the bar and said, "Rat masterminds astride

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alligators or not, Teddy, it's great to be alive again. I miss only one thing: a mystery to be solved. No, I'm a liar, Teddy. Two things."

"And what's the other, Holmes?" asked Teddy, chewing the onion from his gibson.

Sherlock Holmes did not answer. He straightened up. "Speak of the devil!" he exclaimed. "Excuse me, old man, won't you?" And taking off his cap, the detective strode across to the hassock where a woman stood smiling at him. Not a woman but *the* woman. "Can it be you, Miss Adler? I mean, Mrs. Godfrey Norton." For that indeed was the married name of the heroine of *A Scandal in Bohemia.*

"Good morning, Mr. Holmes," smiled the woman. "And it is Irene Adler. I assumed my professional name when my husband's death obliged me to return to the operatic stage."

"Allow me to offer you my arm, Miss Adler," urged the detective. "Let us walk a bit apart. I must know how you come to be here. I was just telling my friend Teddy that there are only two things I miss: Miss Irene Adler and a good mystery."

"In that order, Mr. Holmes?"

"Indeed," insisted the detective.

Irene Adler laughed gaily at the lie. Then they picked out a design in the carpet to use as a path and walked together toward the big window. "I'm from the Diva series of dolls," she explained, "each a replica of a prima donna of a European opera house. The museum has us displayed on the stage of a Victorian doll opera house.

"Well, last year there was that terrible business when the alligators swarmed in on us right at the start of the Christmas Hour, shouting their vile sewer language. If it hadn't been for Captain Rataplan and his thin red line of soldiers which bestrode the aisle and Punch who backed them up with his club no one would have had time to find high ground. The rest of the Victorian Christmas people sought refuge up on the hassock. But in the excitement Lady Gwendolyn, the mistress of the dollhouse, fell over the edge into the midst of the alligators and was swallowed up in a single gulp."

Holmes and the woman had reached the window. They stood in silence, contemplating the darkness beyond the glass and watching the wind swirl the snow beneath the streetlights. Then Irene Adler said, "So here I am. I was chosen to take Lady Gwendolyn's place. Personally, I found the Diva Christmas Hours oppressive, with all the ladies trying to upstage each other. I have always preferred the company of men." Then she said, "But come, tell me how you come to be here?"

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But before the detective could answer, Teddy came up behind them. "My dear Holmes," he said in a voice which had become progressively more British since he'd learned of his ancestry, "there's been a terrible thing. Judy's been murdered."

Judy was quite dead. There was evidence of a severe contusion under her hooked chin. But death had come another way. Concealed within the folds of the voluminous smock hand puppets wear was the handle of the ice pick which had found her heart.

Holmes rose from his examination of the corpse and surveyed the horrified toys who stood around it, including a newcomer, a young man in a cap with bells and a particolored suit. This would be Jack. His box stood wide open and empty.

Irene Adler was pale. "Are we toys capable of murder?" she asked.

"And of seeing that justice is done, as I assure you it will," nodded Holmes grimly. "Now, what happened here?"

Gretta said, "Judy came running up to Jack's box, giggling like a goose and squeaking something about olives. Next thing you know it's whacko!"

"I guess she was leaning over the box when I popped out and the lid caught her under the chin," said Jack. "A nasty rap, Mr. Holmes. And it knocked her out. But she wasn't dead. I sent Gretta for a wet cloth." Here the young man broke down and buried his face in his hands. "Oh Judy, Judy, Judy," he sobbed.

"When Punch and I ran back with the wet cloth Captain Rataplan here was bending over her," said the ballerina. "Then he jumped up quick and started an argument with Jack."

"I thought the scoundrel'd hit her, Mr. Holmes," said the hussar. "I accused him of striking a woman. Not that it surprised me. The man's an utter coward. He proved that last year, lurking in his box when there were alligators to be driven off. I lost my temper and tried to throttle him, I admit it. But Punch leaped up from taking care of Judy and pulled me off."

"The cloth fell from Judy's head," said Gretta. "I leaned over to put it back on and that's when I saw the ice pick. That's when your stuffed friend came running up."

"I was on the hassock getting some tables and chairs from the house for the ladies," said Teddy. "You know me. Anything to help the festivities along. I saw the fight from up there and came on the double."

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"Any chance it was an accident?" asked Punch. "We'd all warned the dumb old hoss not to carry the ice pick around in her pocket."

"This was no accident," said Holmes. Then he paused for a thoughtful moment. "Gretta," he asked, "did you examine Judy before you ran off for the cloth?" When the ballerina shook her head he added, "So she might have been dead already?"

The young woman shrugged.

"And you, Captain Rataplan," asked Holmes, "could you swear Judy was alive when you bent over her?"

"I didn't look further than the mark on her chin and flew off the handle," admitted the fierce hussar. "This Jack fellow's an upstart."

"You can say that again," mused Holmes.

Rataplan did and added, "This fellow whose trouser legs aren't even the same color had the brass to have his eye on Lady Gwendolyn, who lived in the big house on the hassock. Last year I slew three alligators and left them as dead as luggage. And only the brave deserve the fair. But I would never, never have aspired to the hand of so fine a lady."

Rataplan paused to clear his throat. "Of course my heart is elsewhere," he said. Here, like many brave men he was overcome by an attack of shyness and averted his eyes. Holmes was quick to observe that it was the ballerina's unsympathetic gaze he was avoiding. The emotional lives of toys with only an hour of life each year lay close to the surface, like those of young people in wartime.

Holmes looked at Punch. "Landlord, was Judy alive or dead when you put the cloth on her forehead?"

"Search me, guv," said the hunchback. "I mean, the fracas broke out right away."

"And yet you were certainly attached to Judy."

"A strictly professional relationship," insisted Punch. "I mean, did you ever see the snoot on her?"

"You're rather well endowed in that department yourself," observed Holmes.

"But I don't have to look at me, you see," said Punch quickly. "And while we're on the subject, you've got something of a beak yourself."

Holmes turned to confront Jack. "And just what was your relationship with the deceased?" he demanded.

"We all need someone, Mr. Holmes," said Jack.

"But why do you in particular need someone?"

Jack turned white. He lay a hand on the detective's arm and murmured, "Could I have a word in private, Mr. Holmes?"

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"If you'll be more straightforward than you have been up to now," replied Holmes.

The bells on Jack's cap jingled as he swore he would be. When they had moved off a bit from the others Jack said, "I'm sure you realize that I can't trigger my lid latch from the inside."

"I am quite familiar with the Wunderbar jack-in-the-box mechanism," said the detective.

"But the others aren't, you see," said Jack. "My lid latch is defective. Traffic can trigger it and out I pop. 'Surprise!' They think I do it myself, but I can't. When the Christmas Hour comes I can't even get out of my box myself. That's a humiliating situation for a grown toy. That's my dark secret. My first Hour here in the Victorian Christmas exhibit I was lucky. A passing subway train triggered my latch. But I couldn't depend on that. I had to tell my secret to someone. I chose Lady Gwendolyn because she was so kind and good. Every Christmas Hour after that she'd slip over here first thing and let me out.

"But last year the alligators attacked and she fell to her death. In fact, I'd still be in the damned box if Rataplan hadn't come storming over after the alligators turned tail. He called me a coward and beat on the lid with his bloody saber until he accidentally triggered the latch. But what about next year? Well, Judy'd always been a bit soft on me so I took the chance of explaining things to her. She was the one who thought up the olive business. Rataplan's martooni was always the first drink of the night. She'd tell Punch she was keeping the olives in my icebox."

"Your secret has cost the lives of two people," said the detective. "I cannot believe that to be a coincidence. Come, let us settle this matter."

They returned to the waiting circle of toys where Holmes said, "Ladies and gentlemen, Judy's murderer is a very resourceful and decisive person who has committed a perfect crime."

"Come now, Holmes," protested Teddy, "don't tell us you are baffled."

"Consider my dilemma," said Holmes. "There are four suspects: Jack, Captain Rataplan, Punch, and Gretta. All had the opportunity to kill her. There is no clue to tell us which one did. Ergo, a perfect crime."

"And so justice will not be done, Mr. Holmes," said Irene Adler.

"Ah, but it will be, Miss Adler," said Holmes. "It will be indeed. Our murderer's mistake was in committing two perfect crimes. You

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see, you all believed Lady Gwendolyn's tragic death an accident. But in fact she was murdered. Someone pushed her to her death. That was a perfect crime and the murderer would have escaped discovery except for killing again.

"Judy's murder, perfect though the crime was, points the unerring finger of guilt at Lady Gwendolyn's killer. Rataplan and Punch were fighting the alligators. Jack was in his box. Of the three toys on the hassock two are dead. Clearly the murderer is—" Holmes was about to point an accusing finger when a corgi coughed.

The Christmas-tree angel fell silent and the toys froze in their places. The figure of an owlish, self-satisfied-looking young man loomed on the other side of the window glass.

Under his breath Teddy whispered, "It's the second assistant curator from the toy museum, Holmes. Met him once. Something of a royal stuffed shirt, don't you know? Miss Ivy Tinker has spoken of him most severely to me."

"He looks invincibly square, old fellow," whispered Holmes, venturing a glance. "I'd say she's got her work cut out for her." After what seemed an interminable period of time, the human outside the window was led away and Holmes' accusing finger pointed.

But as quick as a cat, Gretta snatched the astonished Rataplan's saber away from him and knocked him to the floor with the flat of it. Punch made a grab for her but she wounded him in the arm. Jack turned pale and popped down in his box, pulling the lid shut after him.

"There are soldiers at all the exits. You can't escape, you know," said Holmes calmly.

"We'll see about that," said the ballerina, holding them at bay with the saber and moving slowly backward in the direction of the Christmas tree. Leaving Irene Adler to tend to the wounded, Holmes and Teddy kept pace as close as Gretta would allow.

"I killed them both, okay?" she boasted. "When fate brought Jack and me together I swore to myself I'd kill anyone who came between us."

"It wasn't fate," insisted Teddy. "It was the second assistant curator."

Gretta didn't hear him. "I knew Jack had something going with Lady Gwendolyn," she said. "I saw them whispering and he'd always pop out of his box the minute she came to visit. I waited for my chance. When the alligators broke in, I took it." She was directly under the tree now. She looked around her and then continued. "But

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right away he took up with Judy. Judy—can you imagine that? Tonight when she came waltzing over to the box, I saw red and applied my foot to the small of her back. It knocked her over the lid just as Jack popped out. I'd only meant to warn her off. But later when I saw I could get away with it, I said what the hell and slipped in the ice pick."

"And now the game's up, Gretta," said Holmes.

With a contemptuous laugh the woman put the saber between her teeth, leaped up into the tree and disappeared from sight.

"But surely she doesn't think she can get away, Holmes?" said the amazed bear.

"There's only one way to find out, old fellow," answered the detective clambering up the tree trunk.

"Onwards and upwards, then," said Teddy who was stuffed with excelsior.

But pursuit wasn't easy. As Gretta fled up the tree, she cut the strings on the wooden ornaments and sent them crashing down on her pursuers, obliging them to seek frequent shelter. And the dancer's excellent physical condition enabled her to leap from branch to branch like a monkey. She soon left them far behind. "Adios, okay, Mr. Holmes?" she shouted triumphantly.

"I've been a blind fool, Teddy," said the detective, ducking to avoid a falling ornament. "She's going to hijack the angel and make it fly her to the Cuban Mission to the United Nations."

"Political asylum?" puffed Teddy.

"More than that, you dumb animal!" shouted Gretta, who was now at the top of the tree with the blade of the saber across the angel's throat. "Before the clock strikes one tonight, the rats in the basement of the Cuban Mission will know of Rataplan's great fear because I will tell them. When you all come to life next Christmas Hour, an army of alligators with rat riders will be there to greet you. Hell hath no fury like a scorned toy!"

With this cry, she vaulted onto the angel's back and slapped the creature's thigh with the flat of the saber. The angel flapped its wings and launched them both into space. It circled the top of the tree in a wide arc and then executed a barrel roll Amelia Earhart would have been proud of. Gretta fell head first the long distance to the floor.

The Victorian Christmas exhibit has been returned to the museum, where it continues to attract crowds. A Bo Peep with a velvet

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bow on her crook was Metcalfe's replacement for the broken music-box ballerina he passed on to Mr. Jacoby for repairs. "Listen, Metcalfe," said the overworked Mr. Jacoby, laying the doll in a small cardboard box and fastening the lid with a stout elastic band, "this goes on the shelf in the closet. If I get to it in twenty years it'll be lucky."

A new, less timid Judy has been found. They say it gives Punch as good as it gets. And sitting in the wing chair wearing the whole regalia of a Knight of the Garter is Teddy. A card nearby informs the world that it is in the presence of a rare Bear of the Realm on loan to the museum from Miss Ivy Tinker.

And here's how this dramatic change came about. When Metcalfe arrived at the museum that Christmas morning, the night watchman claimed more alligator sightings. The second assistant curator used an arch laugh he had developed to heap scorn on things. But since the man's breath passed muster he took a turn around the museum to see for himself.

In each wing of the museum Metcalfe experienced the uncanny feeling that he was interrupting a celebration. Worse than that, out in the corridors every shadow along the wall took on an amphibian shape and every night sound the building made became a vile mutter. Metcalfe was happy to let Owen Glendower lead him home. In spite of the late hour, he was so unsettled he had to read himself to sleep, choosing an old monograph on stuffed toys he'd picked up in a second-hand bookshop.

Later that day when he arrived at McTammany's for his confrontation with Miss Tinker, his indignation vanished when he noticed Teddy's English nightingale stitching and glass Homard et Fils eyes. Excited, he begged her to loan the priceless antique to the museum. She did not agree at once. They were obliged to return to the subject over several dinners and during numerous events about town. Metcalfe was also required to listen to her views on the dangers of extremism on matters of authenticity. To illustrate what she meant, one night she told him that in spite of when they were made, there was something about the Diva doll and the Sherlock Holmes doll that made them go together wonderfully. Metcalfe made the mistake of heaping scorn on this idea with that laugh of his. As a result, she swore she would not loan Teddy to the museum or set eyes on Metcalfe again until the Holmes doll had been rescued from the McTammany stockroom and was standing beside the Irene Adler doll in the Victorian Christmas exhibit.

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Of course, Miss Tinker retained visiting rights to Teddy. Sometimes when she and Metcalfe would come to the museum in the evenings when it was closed, they would bring Owen Glendower along. The corgi rather liked her. The young woman hadn't knocked off all Metcalfe's corners yet but she was well on the way. And sometimes all three of them would stop in on the late-working Mr. Jacoby. In the middle of one of their discussions, Mr. Jacoby set his teacup down on the workbench, stroked his cat, and said, "Speaking of authentic, Metcalfe, how about this: suppose I make the broken Judy doll into a Victorian Christmas-tree angel?"

"Great," said Metcalfe, making an admiring gesture with his pipe. "Honestly, Mr. Jacoby, I don't know where you come up with your ideas."

Here Mr. Jacoby lowered his eyes modestly. But the cat and Owen Glendower were obliged to exchange glances.

SPECIAL NOTE TO SHERLOCKIANS

Received too late to include in this issue, for the annual Baker Street Irregulars Dinner in New York in January, was a new story from Barry Perowne in which A. J. Raffles meets not only Mark Twain but also Sherlock Holmes and Dr. Watson. Look for it in our March issue.

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a *NEW* short story by

FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Peter walked restlessly around the living room, gazing out at the brick-paved patio toward the swimming pool beyond. It was a sprawling house designed by his parents for informal, congenial living. How can people make a good house go so wrong? he thought.

Florence V. Mayberry is unsurpassed in writing about the impact of loss on the human heart . . .

THE HALLUCINATION

by FLORENCE V. MAYBERRY

Peter left the Pacific Coast Highway and drove slowly up the curving hillside drive past Montecito's mansions that were concealed within carefully architectured gardens and hedges, towards the big stuccoed house in which he and his twin sister Charlotty had grown up. Charlotty and their parents were dead and it was all his now. And yet not his. By right of residence the house belonged to Jennie, his wife, who had become a stranger, who had asked him to go away to leave her alone with her grief.

Now, after more than a year—sixteen months to be exact—he was returning to ask Jennie to either be his wife again or to give him a divorce.

Grief had been his too, although he hadn't wanted to be alone as she had. He had spent the last year and a half struggling out of the grief, a sorrow perhaps even greater than Jennie's. Because Charlotty had been his twin, his childhood playmate, a constant companion to tease and be teased by, to plan and carry out joint schemes and youthful escapades with. Then, as they grew older, she became his friend and confidante, someone to dream with.

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And such dreams as they had! He would become a great painter, have a studio in Paris, New York, anywhere but in Montecito, California. Charlotty would be, of course, a famous concert pianist. Even in her teens she had been well on her way to making that dream come true. His dreams, on the other hand, had sidetracked into a pleasant hobby, a happy relaxation to accompany the management of family investments. By her twenties Charlotty had become a concert pianist, nationally known, aiming for international status.

In her thirties, she had died. Worse, she had committed suicide.

No, Jennie couldn't grieve over Charlotty as he did. The grief they shared was for Linnet, their adored daughter, dead at the age of five. Now, thinking of Linnet who would not be there to bounce up and down with delight at his homecoming, pain twisted his heart, made him momentarily breathless. And of course it would be the same for Jennie, perhaps intensified by her solitude, not alleviated. He would talk to her, convince her that pain shared is lessened, that it was time to live in the present, not remain in the past.

The drive his car was following had changed during the months since he had left. Some of the estates had sold off land and big new houses were going up on it. The spaciousness and freedom he remembered from his childhood was changing into a crowded stuffiness—gardens shrinking, trees thinned out. One thing he was glad about, Charlotty wouldn't have to see the change.

Around another curve, and there it was. His dear old house that his father and mother had built. It sat far off the road, down a slope, its long angled roof peeking between tall oak trees. "We're back, little guy," he announced to Danny, the small black Scottish Terrier who was leaning regally against the car window. The dog leaped at Peter, whimpering, sniffing eagerly to recapture some long-forgotten scent. "Remember the old place, Danny?"

Danny had lived here too. His clothes and Danny were all Peter had taken with him to the mountain cabin up in the Sierras, at Bishop. All the tangibles, that is. Memories—that was another matter.

Peter parked the car beside the entrance, half expecting Jennie to appear in the wide doorway to greet him. He had written that he was driving down from Bishop and would arrive this afternoon. But the door remained closed.

He got out of the car, snapped his fingers at Danny, rang the doorbell. A small Mexican girl opened the door, smiled timidly, and

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asked, "Señor Miller?" He nodded, returning the smile. "Mrs. Miller is in? She's expecting me."

"Si, Señor." She held open the door and ushered him into the wide hallway, down shallow steps into the window-lined sitting room, then vanished into a side hallway which led to the big bedroom that had been his and Jennie's and to the room beside it that had been Linnet's.

He walked restlessly around the living room, gazing out at the brick-paved patio toward the swimming pool beyond, then crossed to the opposite raised-balustraded corridor which led to the family room, the dining room and kitchen, and other bedrooms. It was a sprawling house designed by his parents for informal, congenial living. How can people make a good house go so wrong?

Finally he went to the old grand piano that Charlotty, and he too, had practiced on when they were children. It was Charlotty's piano, of course—he had never advanced beyond a few classic pieces and a great deal of jazz—but she left it behind when she moved to New York to study music. Then there was the car accident which had killed their parents, and he and Jennie moved from their apartment into the family house. The piano came with the house. He wondered now if he would be taking the piano to Bishop to sit beside his easel. Or would he and Danny stay here with Jennie, with the old piano still in its familiar corner?

He idly touched the keys in remembered chords, moved by the tonal sweetness that still rose above their old loose rattle. That sweetness suffused him with remembrance of Charlotty, warm, laughing, seated at the piano playing those rippling, intricate tunes that had left him both admiring and envious.

It annoyed him when he discovered that the F above middle C had a broken hammer and was mute. As mute as he remained when he looked up to see Jennie coming down the steps, crossing the room toward him.

Danny wasn't mute. He wheeled from the window where he had been patiently waiting for a butterfly to pierce the glass so he could snap at it, braced his short black legs, and growled at the approaching Jennie. He choked back the growl at the snap of Peter's fingers, but his hackles remained high as he backed against the glass.

"He's forgotten you, Jennie," Peter apologized. "He's been away a long time. And so have I, too long." He stepped toward her, his arms outstretched.

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She put out her hand, repelling his movement, and said coldly, "Don't touch that piano. Leave it alone."

Anger roughened Peter's voice. "It's my piano."

"It's not your piano," Jennie said. "It was your sister's piano. But she left it in this house, and this is my house." Then she added, "When she brings Linnet back to me, she can have it."

Peter felt kinship with Danny's raised hackles, his fey Scottish knowledge that things were not as they should be. The same brute foreboding made him amazed that this woman had once been his beloved wife, had lain with her head on the same pillow as his, had been the idolizing mother of the child whose loveliness and gaiety had bonded them the five years she had lived. Jennie herself had been lovely. Never gay, always intense, sometimes brooding, but lovely. A woman with poetry in her motions, a stirring depth in her voice that coupled with the classic repose of her features became mysterious and intriguing. Her face still had that repose and beauty. But now it was cold, without vitality.

"Don't talk nonsense," he said sharply. "You know very well that Linnet and my sister are dead." Defiantly he struck another chord on the piano. It gave him a piercing reminder of himself as a small boy when he banged at the end of the keyboard to make Charlotty stop practicing and pay attention to him.

"They are not dead," Jennie said in a flat monotone. "Charlotty stole my baby. She's hiding her from me. And you wouldn't help me find them. But I'm waiting. Someday Linnet will remember her mother and make Charlotty bring her back."

Peter's heart seemed to slow, each beat distant and final—like water dropping in a deep well. He thought, I won't be able to say it now. She's sick. I can't ask a woman in this condition to make our separation final, to give me a divorce. Aloud he said, "Jennie, I didn't know you were ill. You should have told me. Nobody's written."

"I'm quite well," Jennie said. "You needn't try to pretend I'm ill, that I'm not able to take care of Linnet, that she should stay with Charlotty. You know very well Charlotty's not a fit person—" She broke off, came to the piano, and with a fierceness startling in juxtaposition with her composed face pushed his hand from the keyboard. "I never want to hear that piano again! Maria should have called me before she let you in. I had decided not to see you." Her voice trailed away. "But I suppose I forgot to tell her." Her voice raised. "Maria!"

The maid ran in from the kitchen area. "Si, Señora?"

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"Maria, you are never to let this man in the house again. He is no longer my husband. This is no longer his house, it is mine. We are separated and I never wish to see him again. He did a terrible thing to me. He helped his sister steal my child."

Maria's eyes opened wide, startled and frightened. She bobbed her head, scurried back down the hall, and the kitchen door swung to and fro with her momentum before the big house became still again except for the soft mutter in Danny's throat.

The cruelty and unreason of Jennie's words took the warmth from Peter's compassion and urged him to leave her presence, to get outside as urgently as that fool butterfly was struggling to beat its way into the room through the window glass. He wished he had never tried to talk with Jennie, that he had remained in his studio cottage painting the mountains, talking pleasantly with friends around a fire in the evenings, and packing through the canyons and up the peaks with Danny scrambling beside him, chin whiskers comical with burrs. He yearned to be back in sunshiny, extroverted living, the kind Linnet and Charlotty liked—to be free forever from the cold strangeness that now permeated this house.

"Jennie, we only separated to get our bearings, not to be divorced. I am still responsible for you. I hadn't realized, no one wrote to me—but, Jennie, it's clear you've brooded too long over Linnet. We need to get over it together. Perhaps go away, leave this house for a time, take a trip. If you have a change of scenery, get away from the past, perhaps we can resolve our difficulties. The truth is, I've never been sure what they were—you wouldn't talk about them. Let me take you to Doctor John. Or a specialist if you prefer."

He drew a deep breath and forced himself to say what he tried never to think about. "Face it, Jennie. The truth about Linnet and Charlotty. Linnet died from a virus. She had the best care, but she died. And Charlotty—Charlotty killed herself. Linnet and Charlotty are dead."

"They're not," Jennie said. Her eyebrows lifted into an expression of superiority. "Charlotty was only hurt, she didn't die, and while I was asleep she ran away with Linnet. You and Doctor John helped her to do it. You took Linnet out of her bed, gave her to Charlotty, and they're hidden away somewhere. That's why I couldn't find them when I woke up."

She stared accusingly at him, her large dark eyes pools of blankness, while shock stiffened his neck, his face. When she spoke again it was slowly, as though she was asleep and trying to reach out of

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a dream into reality. "I remember. Linnet fell asleep and I stood over her, watching her. She had been so sick, so restless with fever, but now she was better, quietly sleeping. I put the ice bag against her forehead to keep her cool and resting. I was so relieved, I had been so frightened about her. Your stupid Doctor John had given me a pill and told me to take it so I could rest. Instead, when you and he left the room I took the pill to Linnet's bathroom and threw it down the drain because when she woke up she would need me. I didn't want to be asleep."

She stopped, tense, listening for some long-lost sound. "Then Charlotty began playing the piano. Even though Linnet's room was far down the hall, I could hear her plainly. And I knew what she was doing. She was trying to awaken Linnet with that stupid tune she encouraged Linnet to keep asking her to play."

"Brahms Lullaby," Peter thought.

"She played it over and over until I thought I would scream. Trying to lure Linnet out of bed, out to the living room, to be with her instead of her mother. You should have been there to stop her, but no, you and Doctor John were in the garden, talking. I know now that you were planning how you would help Charlotty—you always did everything Charlotty wanted. Finally I couldn't endure it, I couldn't have Linnet disturbed, so I shut her door to keep out the sound, went down the hall to the living room, and over to the piano."

Her eyes widened, watching the past float before her. "Charlotty was still playing when I reached her. And crying. She was afraid, I knew, that somehow I would stop her from taking Linnet from me. She had already been in Linnet's room, trying to push past me to touch her, and I had ordered her out.

"She stopped playing and looked up at me. I said, 'Charlotty, all of you are lying, Linnet didn't die, she's only asleep. You're saying that so you can take her from me, keep her for yourself.' She stood up and tried to touch me. But I was ready for her. I had been chopping ice for the ice bag, for Linnet's fever, and I had the ice pick with me. It went in Charlotty, up to the handle. But she was only hurt, she didn't die. Because her eyes stayed open and she said, 'Oh, Jennie!' As though finally she was sorry for trying to take Linnet from me. But it was only an act, I knew she'd keep trying."

Jennie hesitated, looking inward, searching for something she couldn't remember. "I think—I must have fallen asleep then. Because when I woke up I was in bed and Charlotty and Linnet were gone."

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Asleep almost a week, Peter remembered, slipping in and out of consciousness. And silent and remote afterwards.

"Oh, God," he whispered. "Charlotty didn't kill herself—you killed her!" The words seemed crazy, a hideous nightmarish lie. "But Charlotty said *she* did it. Her hands were clasped on the ice pick, we had to force them off. The last thing she said was, 'I did it, Jennie found me and fainted.' " Outrage muffled the shock in his voice. "You were passed out beside her. Danny was whimpering and licking Charlotty's face. It was his barking that called Doctor John and me in from the garden—he was frantic. You didn't come out of shock for days and wouldn't talk when you did. And all this time I've blamed my sister!" His voice broke. "Jennie, why would you kill Charlotty?"

Jennie's face returned to emptiness, her features placid and dead. "I don't know what you're talking about. Just go away. And if you've come to take the piano to Charlotty, I won't let you. I don't want her playing it for Linnet. Besides, it's old—it doesn't play any more. Perhaps something broke in it when Charlotty fell on it that day."

Peter's arm pressed against his middle to still the ache that flared up at the terrible memory of seeing Charlotty lying against the piano, her hands clutching the ice-pick handle, the dog whimpering beside her. He had cried out, "Charlotty, why? Why?" She had tried to smile, shaking her head slightly as though chiding the impulsive, emotional self that had often led her into difficulties. As it had with the man she had loved deeply but who had loved her only transiently. The man she had refused to talk about even to Peter. The man who had fathered Linnet.

Even without an answer from Charlotty, Peter had believed he knew the reason for her suicide. The death of Linnet was her third loss. The first loss was of Linnet's father long before Linnet was born. She was a prominent musician, unmarried and pregnant. Before the pregnancy was noticed she dropped out of the public eye—resting after a strenuous concert season, the papers said. Only Peter and Jennie knew where she was.

The second loss came when he and Jennie adopted Linnet at birth and Jennie turned strange and cold to Charlotty, making it clear she didn't want Charlotty near her child.

The third loss came the day Linnet died.

"Go away, Peter," Jennie said. "I don't trust you. You and Charlotty are alike, you're twins, you want *her* to have Linnet. But you can't stop me from looking for them. I do look. Every day. I go up and down the road asking at all the houses if they've seen Linnet

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and Charlotty. I know Charlotty spies on me sometimes, so she'll know what I've found out about her. One of these times I'll catch her at it, I'll have Linnet again."

He remembered Jennie after she came out of shock, wandering white-faced and silent through the house and garden, searching for a child who would never return. He had tried to comfort her, but she had pushed him away as though his touch revolted her.

His anger vanished, leaving behind only grief and numbed acceptance of horror. He moved toward her and she stepped back. "Go away. You're making my head hurt."

He had to get help for Jennie. Medical help. She was sick, very sick. And legal help? Would he, after almost two years, be the one to accuse his wife of murdering his sister? Drag out scandal for his dead sister as well as for his sick wife?

He snapped his fingers and Danny edged around the wall, eager to reach the outer door. Peter recalled now that he had wondered why hackles raised on Danny's back whenever he was near Jennie since the day Linnet and Charlotty died. He had thought the dog may have blamed their absence on Jennie. But Danny was witness to the murder—he had been there when Jennie plunged the ice pick into Charlotty.

As the man and dog walked through the doorway, the lid of the piano keyboard was slammed shut, punctuating their departure, all its broken music trapped inside, never to be heard again as far as Peter was concerned. He wished hopelessly that it would be as easy to close Jennie away, never to disclose the crazy dissonance that played within her. But he knew that was not possible. Not all pianos play tunes, but people are different, they keep playing their own tunes, *I do look, every day, I go up and down the road—*

He drove to the office of Doctor John, the man who had brought Charlotty and him through all their childhood illnesses. The family doctor who had recommended that he and Jennie adopt a child when Jennie became moody and withdrawn, weeping over her failure to conceive one herself. The doctor who knew that Linnet was Charlotty's baby.

For a few minutes he remained in the car, wondering what he would say. At last he made his decision.

Inside the office, face to face with this longtime friend, he swallowed, opened a dry mouth, swallowed again before he could speak.

"Doctor John, I just came home today. You'll remember Jennie

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asked me to go away after Linnet's death so she could think, be alone for a time. I did, but finally it was so long without hearing from her I thought—well, to be honest I thought I'd ask her for a divorce. But she's sick, Doctor John. I've just been with her, and she's terribly sick. Mentally. I'm sure she hasn't been to see you. Truthfully, she never liked you—perhaps because you meant so much to Charlotty and me. And after Linnet's death she never trusted you. And so—"

He broke off, hesitant, then plunged ahead. "She refuses to believe Linnet is dead. Or Charlotty. She's having delusions that she stabbed Charlotty. That Charlotty, merely wounded, kidnapped Linnet and is hiding her someplace. She goes looking for them, wandering up and down the road, in and out of houses, asking for them. She can't be left alone like that."

He looked pleadingly at the doctor. "Jennie has brooded so long her mind has twisted what actually happened. You were there that day, you heard Charlotty say she killed herself. You even know—why she would. So Jennie's all mixed up and needs care, hospitalization. She needs to be watched. Otherwise she might do it again."

"Do what again?" the doctor asked.

Peter had the eerie feeling that Charlotty was with him, whispering in his mind, urging him, as she so often had, into some twin scheme of theirs.

"Hallucinate," he said, his mouth cottony from its helpless struggle to hold back the lie. "You know. Hallucinate about—murder."

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 597th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine, a delightful short-short by Geoffrey Shires, whose only professional writing until now consisted of a half dozen children's stories published in his local newspaper, the Sussex [*England*] Express, *and a 40-line Detectiverse in the May 1982 issue of EQMM. Mr. Shires, bless him, has discovered the art of writing short and living long. He celebrated his 80th birthday in September of last year. We wish him many, many more—stories as well as birthdays . . .*

SHAGGY DOG STORY

by GEOFFREY SHIRES

My name's Butch. I'm a dog of simple charisma and complicated ancestry. Shaggy, of course. Only a shaggy dog knows words like aficionado and elementary. How come? Elementary, my dear reader. My master is a Baker Street aficionado.

So, to the curious incident of the man in the nighttime. I sleep in the man's kitchen with an ancient pullover and a slipper or two for company. Suddenly one night I woke and padded upstairs. Queer smells!

Boiled-over milk I know, but what's this nasty one? I pawed open the bedroom door—*Wuff!* and *Grr!* The milk had put out the flame and my master was slumped, half gassed. I shook him awake and we staggered downstairs into the fresh air.

They gave me a certificate for canine bravery. Why, you ask, did I wake so timely? It was the horrible hush. That was the curious incident. Every night of his life I hear him snoring away, *hrrrh, zonk—hrrrh, zonk.* Shouldn't do it to a dog!

But this time the man did nothing in the nighttime.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

This is the 598th "first story" to be published by Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine—which means that an issue or two down the line we will be celebrating Number 600—as indeed we celebrate the first stories of all "the brilliant newcomers who have brought honor to our genre" (in Ellery Queen's words in the Preface to the latest Ellery Queen's Anthology—#44—which consists of 27 first stories from EQMM).

EQMM authors have been as young as fifteen and as venerable as eighty. Bill Mitchell, who wrote the light-hearted first to come, is fifty-one, a self-employed financial consultant who likes to read, cook, garden, and stream fish. Several years ago he decided "to start fulfilling a lifelong desire to write." Mr. Mitchell obviously knows the basic rule of writing about what one knows. As a financial consultant he must be an expert at figures . . .

FIGURES

by BILL MITCHELL

In the suburbs the cats headed home before dawn. Robins were astir by daybreak but soon grew weary. Earthworms were few and found only beneath the sprinklered lawns, and gaping cracks rambled the unwatered lawns where browned grass shriveled in thirst. At sunrise locusts began to drone.

Early summer had been hot and dry. Now August steamed. Wednesday night an air inversion formed, trapping pollutants along with heat, and today, Friday, promised to be the worst yet.

A gray, four-door Reliant left the garage area of Free Harbors West, swung onto Westfield Boulevard, went east on 123rd Street for three miles, then accelerated up the Freeway ramp and jockeyed into traffic, flowing with it until exiting onto Midtown Expressway.

Arnold Wimp drove the Reliant. He didn't know about the cats,

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failed to see the robins, wouldn't have recognized an earthworm, and had been as oblivious of the locusts as he now was of the fuzzed-ball sun rising behind the lifeless haze.

Nature's patterned movements were not of Arnold's world. Games, photography, and puzzles were—figures, too. Arnold was adept with figures, those he caused to be electronically arranged into columnar lines and analyzed for his precise reports, and those curved beside the pool at Free Harbors West. He liked them both, although for different reasons.

Arnold's adeptness with the latter might surprise an onlooker. Short, slightly built, with close-cropped auburn hair, a bookish but not unhandsome face, Arnold wore tortoiseshell-framed glasses with thick lenses, usually drooped upon his slender nose, that made his green eyes look owlish. He had a winsome, slow-to-come smile and a penchant for women a foot taller than himself. Perhaps a contributing factor to his success with them was the T-topped burnished-bronze Z-car sharing his garage with the Reliant except after dark and on weekends.

A quirk contributing to the anomaly of his success was his walk. Along the street, his briefcase dead down in his left hand, his right arm pumping like a windshield wiper on high, pigeon-toed Arnold pattered like a man for whom the nearest men's room couldn't be too close by.

And so did Arnold move in the heat, cool as the blue stripes in his seersucker suit, from the parking garage to Gem City National, twelfth floor. At work Arnold always wore a white shirt with a button-down collar. And while white shirts had come back, for Arnold they had never left.

Gem City National, eighteen rectangular stories of glass and steel, occupied the entire south side of Market Street between Fourth and Fifth Avenues. On the floors above the first, except for the eighteenth, the elevator doors opened onto marble foyers. Directly opposite the elevators across the foyers were colorful lounge areas. On each side of the foyers solid glass double doors with large gold disc handles led to the respective bank departments. The long wide rooms of the departments were built for open communication, were well acousticaled, and their centers contained cubicles with carpeted half walls about five feet high for supervisory personnel. In the northeast corner of the west wing of the twelfth floor a single glass-enclosed office was for Vice President Willard Wright.

From his first day, it had been Arnold's habit to arrive first in

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the office, but Sally Forth changed that. Since she was hired three months ago, Sally arrived ahead of Arnold at least two mornings a week, and when he arrived he would find her eagerly busy at her desk.

But though he was mildly disturbed by her transgression, Arnold couldn't fault her work or her dedication. Besides, though reserved, Sally was intelligent, blonde, pretty, tall, and had other qualities that warranted his cultivation.

Vi Preston, who had been hired about the same time, was obviously different, a borderline nine with an empty attic. With jiggling blouses and a roving eye, Vi was boldly open. Her seventh day on the job she had asked Arnold, by the water cooler, if he wouldn't like to take her home some evening. Seeing no puzzle in the invitation, Arnold declined.

That reasoning aside, there was the code by which Arnold lived and never deviated. At work one did not play with figures of any kind. One might make certain estimates, occasionally run a trial balance or two, but any manipulating was always done after hours.

Bianca, third desk left in the front row outside Willard Wright's office, lived in the same quadrangle as Arnold at Free Harbors. Diagonally between their condos two winters ago a path melted through the snow. But then suddenly Bianca chilled to Arnold and the path froze. Arnold, not one to trod a single track, was barely miffed—he had blazed other trails, one to payroll on the eighth floor and another to escrow on the fourteenth—still, the chilled Bianca perplexed him. When he eventually learned the reason, he devised a game. And Arnold was a very clever player.

Stepping off the elevator, Arnold approached his cubicle from down the long aisle.

Sally looked up. "Good morning, Mr. Wimp. Terrible out there, isn't it?"

"Oh. Yes. I suppose so. But you look refreshing. The green of your dress is cool. It's very nice with your hair."

She parried his compliment. "I've nearly completed the Johnson audit Mr. Wright wants this morning. Would you like to see it first?"

"Yes, I would, thank you." Arnold let the parry pass and walked into his cubicle, straightening his MBA diploma slightly askew on the half wall beside his desk. He unlocked his desk and in the lower right-hand drawer placed the folders from his briefcase.

A few minutes later Sally entered Arnold's cubicle, set the audit

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down on his desk, and stood before him. Arnold looked up. "Mr. Wimp, I was looking for the Adams folder in the Special Accounts file this morning and couldn't find it."

"That's because I took it and some others home to work on last night."

"Well, that explains it. May I please have it when you're finished?"

"Sure. And Sally, please, when are you going to start calling me Arnold? Mister is so formal and this isn't a formal place."

"But you know Miss Shoat instructed me to address all supervisors and Mr. Wright formally."

"Forget Ima."

"Very well—Arnold."

"By the way, Sally, we're having open house at Free Harbors tomorrow night. The steaks will be thick and the wine will flow. Fourish until—" he waved his hand vaguely, looking directly at her.

She gazed at him coolly for a moment, thinking what a brazen imp he was, that his directness matched the office gossip. A smile crept into the corners of her mouth. "Maybe. I'll let you know."

"At your convenience, Sally," Arnold said nonchalantly. As she left, he watched her long legs swing through the cubicle-opening and noticed that she wore a gold chain around her right ankle. Lacing his fingers behind his head he leaned back in his chair.

There is regular activity in most bank accounts, money moving in and out, but some accounts have little activity. More than a few have none. Dormant accounts. Despite what the address of record reads, the true location of many dormant-account holders is unknown.

At various banking institutions throughout the country dormant accounts are now and then looked upon with Edenous eyes, not in contemplation of taking the fruit, but merely to borrow it, such as when a sudden opportunity necessitates an interim loan.

Sudden opportunity, given the necessary seed-money, occurs from time to time in real estate, particularly in rental properties. With liberal depreciation schedules, deductible interest, and rent-escalator provisions to the rentees, rental property affords the owner potential capital gain while generating sufficient cash flow to pay indebtedness. And inflating real-estate values provide opportunity to strike the mother lode.

Nearly two years prior to this oppressive August day real-estate

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values were beginning their dramatic rise. One of the many envisioning a killing was Willard. But Willard was short of seed-money.

Before electronic banking there were three ingredients necessary to embezzle dormant accounts—accessibility to the accounts and knowledge of their habits, an understanding of bank-audit systems, and a willingness to take the risk. Modern application of this concept requires a fourth ingredient—comprehension of computer systems and programs. Willard Wright possessed all four ingredients.

Like Willard, Arnold knew the habits of dormant accounts and he also knew Gem City National's computer programs absolutely cold. And he had recognized almost from their first meeting that there was a chafing between himself and Willard. But Arnold, an orphaned streetwise New York City boy, had learned early the workings of human nature and that opportunity often comes in strange ways and not always to the quick and the bold.

In his formative years, in one of his foster homes, Arnold was favored by a kindly lady who loved to read stories to him. He had liked folk tales, especially fables. Growing up, he often saw similarities between the real and the make-believe, concluding that the stories ostensibly for children, on most of whom he felt the meat of the stories were wasted, were really intended for adults. "The Hare and the Tortoise" had been among his favorites.

Thus instead of immediately tripping the lever on Willard, Arnold decided to study the puzzle from all angles while quietly watching his rabbit run.

While so studying, word had come to Arnold about the fickle Bianca and Willard. Arnold was not so much shocked as he was amazed. Although it was common knowledge that Willard frequented The Dear's Palace, Arnold had thought Bianca to have normal, though zesty, appetites, and he was flabbergasted by this kinky development.

Now, gleefully, Arnold had two puzzles to solve.

One was balancing the books. It wasn't that he had lost his taste for Bianca or that he bore Willard malice for stealing her, but it *was* necessary that the books balance. Two was leveraging privileged information for gain. At first Arnold was concerned that he was a bit young to become a vice-president. But knowing his abilities were already well regarded by his superiors, and then being thoroughly possessed by the star-in-eye syndrome, he conjectured that if the one obstacle, Willard, was removed in just the right way—well, one never could tell what might result.

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Late one afternoon as Arnold pondered in his cubicle he had suddenly seen a game plan to solve not only both puzzles, but serendipitously, a recently developed personal problem: his frolicsome weekend figures were becoming expensive.

Balancing the books and solving the personal problem required special equipment. Gain from privileged information required special knowledge. Arnold still had a key to Bianca's condominium and an excellent camera with many attachments, including timers and wide-angle and telephoto lenses that took surprisingly good pictures in low light. Of Arnold's special knowledge we have already written.

For Arnold's first move the photographs were choice. And when presented with them, Willard, totally subdued, capitulated to Arnold's demands without so much as a flared nostril.

In his second move, Arnold secreted Willard's computer access code and began making a series of complicated transactions on Willard's behalf.

Now the office manager, Imogene Shoat, was sharp of mind and keen of eye. And she was suspicious by nature. She was well aware of the natural friction between Arnold and Willard. Sometime after Willard began his clandestine activity a couple of events occurred, though widely spaced, that caused suspicion to flicker across her nimble mind. But becoming office manager had been a hard climb. There was no man to care for Ima, and her hope of such union was fading. Despite her publicly broadcasted replays of hits with potential intendeds, deep down, knowing that Ima had to take care of Ima, she never fanned the flickers to flame.

Willard, tall, slender, wearing an ascot and resplendent in a Saint Laurent, arrived at 9:20 on this August morning. His secretary immediately took him his coffee and left, closing the door behind her.

Sitting very erect in his chair, Willard took a sip of coffee and spread *The Wall Street Journal* open before him. Inserting a Virginia Slim into a long 14K-gold-tipped ivory holder, he placed the holder in one corner of his mouth, gripping it with his teeth, lit the cigarette, and proceeded to read the paper with his opaque gray eyes.

By noon the hazed orange sky developed a cast of pollutant brown and the temperature soared.

Gem City National's air-conditioning quit sometime during the lunch hour. By 1:30 the water cooler was empty, the soft-drink ma-

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chine by 1:47. Vi's dress clung even more closely to her softly rounded parts. Beads of perspiration formed above Ima's upper lip. A new young receptionist fainted at 2:01. Sally, though wilted, worked on, and even Arnold was uncomfortable. Willard removed his ascot but left on his suit coat. His secretary, while taking dictation, saw Willard's finely arched eyebrows melt and run. When Willard blotted at them with his handkerchief the lines blurred and looked like two tan caterpillars curled on his forehead.

At 2:32 Gem City National's president walked into Willard's office with two other men no one had seen before and closed the door. A uniformed policeman stood just outside the door.

The president entered the elevator at 2:35, touched the button that read 18, and with his chin on his chest studied the elevator floor. In the adjoining elevator the uniformed policeman, the two other men, and Willard, handcuffed, rode downward.

Behind the solid glass double doors of the west wing on the twelfth floor, his secretary wept softly. Bianca had watched wide-eyed. Ima, her mouth compressed into a slit, gave one firm smug downward nod of her head. Arnold had watched the event from his cubicle, and when Willard was led away the smile that was so slow to come to Arnold's face came. Sally Forth also witnessed the event and the smile that came to Arnold.

The president phoned Arnold at 2:55. "All things considered, I think it best you dismiss the employees for the weekend," he said. "And, Arnold, I'd like to see you in my office at nine on Monday."

"Right, sir." Arnold cast a glittering eye at Willard's office, and this time his smile came very quickly.

Puffed with importance, he announced the early closing to each of the other department heads.

The western sky had become black. Great yellowed trees of lightning flashed against the blackness and spread their tremulous branches across the sky.

The employees, grateful, quickly dispersed.

When the department was nearly empty, Arnold zipped shut his briefcase and with his right index finger lifted his suit jacket from the coat rack and flung it over his right shoulder ready to leave.

As he headed for the elevator he saw Sally still at her desk.

"Hey, Sal," he said. "Come on."

"In a second, Arnie. I've just a minute more."

He stepped to her desk. "You sure are a glutton for punishment."

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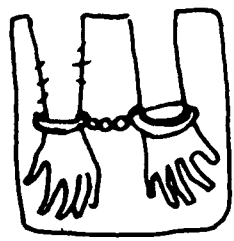
"It's okay. You go ahead. I'll be right along."

"Will I see you tomorrow then?" he asked.

"I didn't promise." She smiled demurely.

The smile that came to Arnold's face was slower than the one Sally had seen earlier. He disappeared toward the solid double glass doors, the hand holding the coat over his shoulder flopping his tucked right elbow like a broken wing.

As he stepped into the elevator Sally grabbed the phone and poked its buttons. "We were right, Lieutenant. I confirmed it a few minutes ago. The paperwork's all here. He's on his way down and should be out front—" she looked at her watch and hesitated "—just about now."



DETECTIVERSE

BUNGLERY

by JAN MUTZA

There once was a burglar named Hank,
Who robbed the First National Bank.
He jumped in his car
But he didn't go far.
He'd forgotten to fill up his tank.

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DEPARTMENT OF "FIRST STORIES"

Our "first story" #599 is, fittingly, a look into the brink—tight, taut, and tense.

The author, A. J. Vogl, has for the last twenty years made a living as a magazine editor. "The closest I came to paranoia," he wrote us, "occurred some years ago, when I was putting together advice for a media psychologist to dispense to the multitudes. My fear—admittedly, not entirely paranoid—was that someone would find out I'd work so cheap" . . .

THE PARANOID CLUB

by A. J. VOGL

His skin—it was the color of old clothesline—made the chairman look much older than his forty-eight years. For that reason, around the agency they called him G.O.M.—for Grand Old Man, of course. He supposed it was meant respectfully, but one could never be sure; the advertising game was so pitilessly competitive. You can be sure he didn't drop his guard.

On the chairman's left sat roly-poly Mr. Sims, who'd had a weight problem ever since leaving the university. There was no question in his mind, or anybody else's, that he would have gotten tenure but for the vicious stories that had circulated against him. And when he ruthlessly quashed the stories, they'd accused him of a ruthlessness unbecoming a professor. Now he sold men's shoes for Bloomingdale's. Nights he wrote long letters to high officials, and sometimes worried about being too small.

Mrs. Cardwell, the third member of the admissions committee, was older than either of the two men. Not that you would have thought so. Her red hair may have had something to do with that, and her cleavage. She wore a filmy floral-print dress said to be too youthful for a woman of her years. Backbiters had said that of her

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clothes for years. "Who cares what backbiters say?" she'd exclaim if their bites got back to her. Once she had been a singer of popular songs. They say she could have been a great one, too, but had refused to play ball with the mob.

Still, she wound up with an annuity, a small but devoted fan club, and a rent-controlled apartment on East Eighty-eighth Street. Her life now was perfect, she often told her friends, except for the man with the large dog who lived above her who was ruining her health. And her building didn't even allow animals.

They sat behind a bare table at one end of a long narrow room. The chairman stood and smiled carefully when Mr. G. entered and made a welcoming motion with his hands.

As Mr. G. advanced into the room, the sound of his heels seemed supernaturally loud to him. A fancy clubhouse like this, he thought, you'd figure they could afford a rug. Unless—

"Please sit in that chair," the chairman said, pointing.

Odd, since it was the only other chair in the room. Mr. G. sat. It was very comfortable.

"As you have been told," the chairman began after he also sat down, "all prospective members are known only by initial—to spare embarrassment and protect confidentiality. In practice, this policy may seem cold and impersonal, but I hope you won't hold it against us."

Mr. G. shook his head from side to side. "Of course not," he said, at the same time wondering whether they believed that G. was his real initial. Only a fool—

"So, too, I hope you will not blame us if our questions seem overly personal, even—offensive."

"Of course not, of course not—" and G. just caught himself from repeating the words a third time. It was the chair, that was it. It was too damned comfortable. It could make a man agree to anything. He would have to keep his guard up, that was for sure.

"So, then—let us begin," the chairman said. "Tell us your story."

"I'm being followed," said Mr. G.

"Who would want to follow you?"

"My boss. But *he's* not following me. He's having me followed."

"For what purpose?"

"He's looking for a reason to fire me."

"Why?"

"He thinks I'm after his job."

"Are you?"

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"He's paranoid."

"Oho."

"I mean it. If I was after his job, I'd get it, believe you me, and do it better than he's doing it, too."

"Tell us, what's your boss like?"

"He's forty-one, smokes two cigars a day—one at ten o'clock, one at three-thirty. He's married, has five kids—all girls: six, nine, eleven, sixteen, and eighteen—lives in Hartsdale, collects Civil War memorabilia, and is a goddamned fascist."

"Still, he doesn't sound like somebody who'd have you followed," the chairman said.

"I think I know him better than you do."

"Certainly, certainly you do. Well now, why don't you describe this man who's following you."

"A tall man who walks with a limp and wears a cape—he has eyes like burning coals."

"Extraordinary."

"It's an old technique—one can be so conspicuous as to become inconspicuous."

"One can?"

"You sound just like my psychiatrist. He sent me here. He thinks I'm paranoid."

"We get a lot of referrals—from the best men in the field. But it takes more than that," the chairman said, leaning back in his chair. He smiled so quickly you might have missed it. "Well, what do you think?"

"What do you mean?"

"Are you paranoid?"

"If I say yes, I'm not, because a true paranoid wouldn't know it, would he? And if I say no, you won't let me into the club."

"Things are never so simple." The chairman turned to Mrs. Cardwell, whose lips looked ready to whistle. "What do you think, Mrs. C.?"

"I think he's trying to put something over on us," she said.

"You mean he's *playing* paranoid," interjected roly-poly Mr. Sims, using his eyeglasses like a baton.

"Exactly," said Mrs. Cardwell.

"Why would I want to do that?" exclaimed Mr. G.

"To get into the club, of course," she said.

"But why, if I wasn't paranoid?"

"To expose us."

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"As what?" he demanded.

"You can't use that tone on me, young man," she replied. "I'm a former chairman, you know."

"Don't let him upset you," the chairman said to her, then turned to Mr. Sims. "Please proceed."

"Do I look paranoid to you?" Mr. Sims asked Mr. G.

"Is that a trick question?"

"A simple question, that's all it is."

The applicant looked into all their faces and saw nothing that gave an inkling. "Yes," he finally said.

"Come, come, my man, you can do better than that."

"No?" Mr. G. asked hopefully.

Sims turned to the chairman, a sly look of triumph on his face. "For anybody who claims to be paranoid, he's pretty indecisive."

"That *was* a trick question," Mr. G. charged, his voice rising. "You're out to get me."

The chairman raised his eyebrows expressively. "You have to admit, a true paranoid response."

"Tell us more about this man who's following you," said Mrs. Cardwell.

"I don't know any more about him."

"Does he follow you at certain times of the day?"

"Oh, yes. He picks me up on my way to work, then again when I leave. The way he looks, he's not hard to miss."

"Of course," she said. "Have you ever tried to shake him?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Ah—escape from his surveillance?"

"No. *I've* got nothing to hide."

Mrs. Cardwell chuckled drily.

"Your boss thinks otherwise," the chairman commented.

"Tell me this," said Mr. Sims. "Why haven't you reported this man to the police?"

"You think I'm crazy? That's just what my boss is waiting for."

"Why so?"

"Can you imagine how it would sound? 'Highly placed executive believes he's being followed by man with limp and cape and eyes like burning coals.' I'd be fired on the spot."

"Not if it could be determined that this man was hired by your boss."

"That could never be proved."

"Why not?"

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"My boss isn't an idiot. He used an intermediary."

"How do you know that?"

"I would. Wouldn't you?"

The three members of the board looked at each other. Then the chairman spoke. "Let's see if we can agree on a premise. Your boss is having you followed to get something on you. Is that correct?"

"Correct."

"But you say you have nothing to hide."

"That's so."

"Think a moment. What innocent act or event in your daily life could be misinterpreted and held against you?"

G. thought a moment. "I can't think of any."

"Let your imagination rove," the chairman urged.

G. thought some more. "I never take a vacation," he said finally.

"Yes?"

"Embezzlers never take vacations."

"Splendid," the chairman said. "You've got the idea. What else?"

"Well, when my secretary Mrs. Cardoza and I work together, it's often behind closed doors—and after hours, too."

The members of the board looked unimpressed.

"Mrs. Cardoza is a blonde divorcee with legs that leave you breathless. And, if you'll forgive me"—he nodded his apology at Mrs. Cardwell—"I have to say she's got the hots for me. Everybody in the firm knows that."

"Of course," the chairman said.

"You don't believe me?"

"We have no reason to doubt you."

"Well, I have the feeling that doubting me is what this interview is all about. You don't really believe me. That's why you're making me go through this routine."

"Mr. G., we must be sure," the chairman said.

"Well, I hope I've convinced you," G. said sarcastically.

"Putting you to the test is for your own good. If you *aren't* paranoid, this club would be the worst place for you," Mrs. Cardwell said.

Mr. G. drew himself up in his too-comfortable chair. "Will that be all?"

The chairman looked to the other two. They nodded.

"It would seem so," he answered. "But, if I may, I would like to bring up one last point. This man who's following you—did it ever occur to you to confront him?"

G. frowned.

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"I mean go up to him and say: I know what you're up to and I demand that you stop immediately."

"No, I couldn't do that."

"Why not? What do you think would happen?"

"No, no, that's impossible."

"Why? Is he so threatening?"

"I'm bigger than he is, I outweigh him by fifty pounds."

"Is it those eyes like coals?" asked Mrs. Cardwell.

"They don't scare me."

"Then what is it, Mr. G.? What's holding you back?"

Mr. G. stared straight ahead. They heard him grinding his teeth.

"Let's see if we can help you toward an answer," the chairman said. "What's the worst thing that could happen?"

"I don't know what you mean," G. answered in a low voice.

"I think you do," the chairman said.

G. shook his head.

"Really now, Mr. G.," the chairman chided gently. "What would be so terrible about finding out he wasn't following you at all?"

"I won't stand for this," G. said, which was pretty funny, actually, since he was having an awful struggle getting to his feet from the depths of the too-comfortable chair.

By the time he made it, he found that the chairman was already standing, and Mrs. Cardwell and Mr. Sims, too. They were all smiling. G. didn't have time to wonder if there was something fishy about their smiles. The chairman put out his hand and obviously spoke for all of them.

"Mr. G.," he said, "welcome to the club."

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a ***NEW*** short story by

WILLIAM BANKIER

He didn't go to bars after women, Mike McGarry told his wife—he went to get drunk. It was true enough most of the time . . .

ONLY THE BEGINNING

by WILLIAM BANKIER

It required quite a few drinks of an evening before Mike McGarry could wander into a bar as seedy as The Blue River. But this was one of those nights. He had begun pouring whisky for the regional sales force at half past five. Now, around midnight, he was on the loose and doing his number, playing the part of the well dressed, middle-aged loner in the dangerous dives of Montreal.

He had hit The Blue River once before, a year ago. Located on lower Drummond Street, not far from the furnished room McGarry rented in order to have a place to sleep when, for whatever reason, he rejected the long voyage home, the bar was one of the kind that survives despite its appearance of terminal decay.

Now McGarry wandered between tables arranged on an unswept floor, chose the bar stool with the least stuffing showing through cracked maroon plastic, and braced his elbows on the mahogany. Between bottles standing against a streaky mirror, his face beamed at him in a mood of alcoholic confidence.

"Yes, sir—what can I get you?"

Here was a surprise, a young female voice speaking English. Most of the bar staff in Montreal were French-Canadian since both languages were needed to serve the public and bilingualism had never been a specialty of the Anglos apart from the opening sentence of a political speech.

"Hello—good evening." McGarry poured good will over her be-

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cause she was not more than twenty and in the bar light, which was a diabolical red, she looked plump and sultry if not beautiful. "I'll have a Three Eagles," he said, naming the brand recently launched by his employer, Associated Distillers. "Make it a double. Ice and a little branch water."

When she brought the drink and he paid her, he said, "Have one yourself."

"Thanks, I'll have a coffee," she said, inclining her head toward a coffeemaker just visible in the murk at the end of the bar. "Branch water. That's plain water, is it?"

McGarry used the term so that people would ask. "Right. In Alabama that's what we call it, water that comes out of the branch of a river. As opposed to soda water."

"You're from the South."

"Ya'll oughta be able to tell." He laid it on and made her laugh.

"I'm not from Montreal either. I come from a little place in Ontario. Baytown."

"Over toward Toronto, just off Highway 401. A railway town." Was he mistaken or did something happen behind her eyes when he said 'railway town'? Never mind, his knowledge had surprised her, which was, again, his intention.

"Nobody knows about Baytown."

"I do. I'm a marketing man, I spend my days looking at maps and deciding where to allocate my company's money." He lifted his glass. "I work for the outfit that makes this stuff."

She was impressed. The bar was quiet, so she was able to get her coffee and come back and chat with him while he finished that drink and had another. Her name was Bella Ford and she had arrived in Montreal a month ago. Yes, her lack of French was a problem but the boss took her on because she was willing to work for the lousy wages he paid. McGarry enjoyed watching her as she talked between swallows of coffee and he decided she was a girl who succeeded with men. It had little to do with brains or honesty or even to do with beauty—it was an authority based on sex. Not that she flaunted it or even had to try. Men would find it hard to refuse Bella Ford anything she really wanted.

Customers arrived and the girl became busy. McGarry drank alone, enjoying the coming and going, the rancid smell of the place, the monotonous music from the juke box, the feeling that he was surrounded by thieves and failures. In daylight, he realized, one glance at this place would fill him with remorse. But alcohol released

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another personality, a mischievous child within him. Left in control, this Mike McGarry would never work very hard, never swallow pride and eat dirt to gain promotion. This one wanted only to drink and kiss and fight and end up rolling in muck on the ground like a dog off the leash.

"When do you finish?" he inquired. She had cleared the latest rush and was now turning the pages of a tabloid spread on the bar, licking her thumb each time like somebody's grandmother.

"We close at two."

A little over an hour. McGarry sensed his mind had been made up for some time—he was not going home. His wife didn't care how late he telephoned as long as he telephoned. She had attended the Montreal Symphony concert that evening at Place des Arts. As head of the Ladies Symphony Society, she was close to Patel, the new MSO conductor recently arrived from Bombay. She might not even be home herself, having gone on to Patel's penthouse where the elite would be guzzling champagne and having convulsions about the insanity of oboe players and the sexual proclivities of operatic tenors.

"Hello, Iris, it's me."

"Where are you?"

"In a bar—where else?"

"How is she, is she nice?"

"I've told you, I don't go after women—I go to get drunk." This was McGarry's official statement and it was true enough most of the time. He presented himself as an amused observer of life, a tolerant, solitary drinker feeding his hunger for an understanding of his fellow human beings. He was not certain whether Iris accepted the story at face value or whether she knew that he fell into bed with some stranger on one occasion in ten. Anyway, it hardly mattered—she had Patel.

"So I'm not going to try to drive home," he concluded.

"That awful room." He had taken her there once after a movie, thinking the sleazy surroundings might prove stimulating. The event had been fairly successful but, recalling her patient sigh when she stepped inside the door, he had not repeated the experiment.

"Well," she said, "don't stay up too late, Michael. And eat something."

When the bar closed, McGarry walked Bella over to Mountain Street where there was an all-night restaurant. They sat in a booth and he drank coffee while she ate a hot hamburger sandwich soaked in barbecue sauce with chips and peas floating on the same plate.

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"That was good," she said, bending to her milkshake. She smiled then, the first time she had let go to this extent. The russet cheeks rose and crinkled beside her eyes, the full lips curved in a grin that could only be called roguish. McGarry felt his heart miss a beat. God, he had not been given a shot as sweet as that in years. "I suppose I'm obligated to you," she said.

"Don't be silly. I like talking to you."

"Even so."

Now he was the one who felt obligated. It was with elation mixed with a sense of duty that McGarry led her back to the room on Drummond Street. "Sorry it's such a dismal place," he said, leaving the overhead light off and switching on the lamp beside the bed.

"You should see where I live" was her reply.

Now, when he kissed her, he discovered she was blocky and solid. It was as if his arms would barely go around her. Her lips were warm, but dry. There was no passion in McGarry and she seemed to have something else on her mind. He turned on the radio, which was set at the CBC French outlet where he could count on decent music. "Ici—Adagio—" said a resonant voice, and piano notes fell like drops of rain from azalea leaves in a park where McGarry used to play when he was a boy.

He got out his emergency bottle, poured two drinks, and took the glasses to where she was sitting on the edge of the bed. As she accepted her glass, she produced the most prodigious yawn McGarry had ever witnessed. "Sorry," she said, "it's not the company, it's the hour."

"I'm tired too. We'll drink these and go to sleep." He put his arm around her sturdy back. "Love ya, kid, but I've had so much booze."

She was looking at the floor as if the carpet offended her. He could not ignore that frown. "What's the matter?"

"You shook me when you said Baytown is a railway town."

"Isn't it true? Main rail center between Montreal and Toronto."

"Our house isn't far from the CN station. The tracks go through fields half a mile away."

"Just a little girl from Little Rock," McGarry recited. "Lived on the wrong side of the tracks."

"That's not what I'm talking about." Through narrowed eyes, she kept staring at the same spot on the carpet. "I had an older sister named Denise. She was a lot prettier than I am. She had long blonde hair, like an angel. She was born deaf. She couldn't talk except with her hands. But she learned to type and she had a good job."

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McGarry waited out a lengthy pause. He sensed the revelation was programmed, that he wouldn't be required to say anything.

"One night—five years ago—Denise left the house and walked across the field to the tracks and put her head on the rail—and waited for the express to come by."

"Oh, Bella—"

"They did an autopsy and discovered she was three months' pregnant." Bella sipped her drink, allowing the bitter taste to influence her smile. "And that was the end of that. Except I always knew who the father was and where he went. Other people knew too, but they didn't give a damn." She turned her head and gave McGarry a look that frightened him. "And now I'm going to do something about it. Which is why I've come to Montreal."

"He's here? The guy who got your sister pregnant?"

"That's right. Maybe you've heard of him. He's a radio announcer. His name is Kevin Atkinson."

McGarry looked every bit as bad as he felt standing outside the window of Rodrigo's Restaurant on Ste. Catherine Street, watching Kevin Atkinson broadcasting his morning show on CJCF. Atkinson, all six feet three inches of him, looked deliberately comic sitting there at his consolette behind the plate glass, wearing a huge flannel nightgown over his seersucker suit while behind him in the restaurant booths the customers ate breakfast supervised by the sinister figure of Roscoe Gershwin.

Atkinson finished reading a commercial, nattered for a few seconds more, and released a record he had been holding on the turntable beside him. He was soundproofed by the plate glass. Seeing McGarry out there on the pavement, the morning man mimed shock, recovered himself by clutching the arms of his swivel chair, then threw a Boy Scout salute and indicated by a toss of the head that he would join his friend soon in the corner booth.

Gershwin greeted McGarry and conducted him to the booth reserved for their celebrity announcer. "How's the distilling business, Mike?" he asked, putting down two menus.

McGarry collapsed with a sigh. "Pretty good. Not as exciting as it used to be when your crowd controlled it, but pretty good."

"You look like you've been in the river," Gershwin commented. "Sampling the product is one thing but you're going to kill yourself."

The list of breakfast dishes turned McGarry's stomach. "Just coffee please, Roscoe. Noir."

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Gershwin went away and a few minutes later, when McGarry was wondering whether the first sip of coffee was going to stay down, Kevin Atkinson approached slowly, pausing for conversations with fans of his eccentric radio program. "What brings you out at this hour?" he said, rattling the booth as he settled in. "Close your eyes, Mike, oysters aren't in season."

"It must be important or I wouldn't be here. Life or death, maybe."

"My life and your death from the look of it." The waitress showed up and stood with her arms across the radio announcer's shoulder, admiring his big tanned face and the slate-grey eyes in it as he recited, "Three eggs, lean bacon not too crisp, a grilled tomato, whole-wheat toast with lots of butter, pot of coffee, and an oxygen tent for my ancient father."

"Gluttony is one thing," McGarry told him, inhaling deep breaths, "but there's no call for sadism."

"I'll eat under my jacket. Relax. Listen, would I do anything to harm the executive who pays me all that glorious money to MC his sales meeting? It's been a year, Mike. When are we doing another?"

The meeting last summer in the Laurentians had been the occasion of their first spending time together. Hiring Atkinson to add spice to the affair was an inspired decision on McGarry's part. The broadcaster threw in free plugs on the air, mentioning salesmen by name, and on the weekend of the meeting he and McGarry hit it off from the beginning.

"We're holding it in the autumn this year," McGarry said. "Don't worry, I've got you down for it. That isn't what I've got to tell you."

"Say on."

"What does the name Bella Ford mean to you?"

"Bella Ford." Atkinson was stabbing a fried egg with a crust of toast, looking at his companion brightly as if they were playing a word game, but behind the alert eyes his mind was taking evasive action. "Rings a bell. How do you know the name?"

"I met her last night. She's working in a bar and she knows you. Does Baytown put her in context?"

"Baytown? Hell, yes. I worked at CBAY for over a year. It was my first radio job, five years ago. Then I got a better spot in Toronto and last year I came down here." The announcer was chewing and nodding. "The one I knew was Denise. I took her out for a while. Bella was her little sister."

"She's not so little now."

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"I hardly noticed her. I seem to remember dirty feet in sandals and a band-aid on the knee."

"Kev, I think there may be trouble. She's a very angry girl. She told me what happened to her sister." McGarry recounted the story of Denise Ford's suicide, the discovery of her pregnancy. "Bella says she's going to make you pay. No bones about it, she wants revenge."

"And you took her seriously?"

"If you heard her, you would." McGarry ordered another cup of coffee. He was slowly coming back to life. He could watch his friend eat now—when the coffee was poured, he could even take half a slice of Atkinson's toast and nibble the edge of it. "Did all that really happen?"

Atkinson remembered, his face softening. "Denise was beautiful. Not just outwardly beautiful, although she was that. Maybe it's because she was deaf—anyway, the handicap seemed to bring out something better in her. When she smiled, there was this glow—"

"Then why did she kill herself?"

"It shook me when I heard." Atkinson had been over it in his mind countless times. He whitewashed himself now in front of his friend. "But, Mike, try to understand. I'd been a year in Baytown, I had to get on. There was an opening at a Toronto station. I sent them an audition tape and was offered the job, to start in two weeks. Denise was shattered. I didn't expect her to come apart like that."

"Did you know she was pregnant?"

"She told me. I thought it might be a story to keep me in town. Anyway, I said I'd help her with money to get rid of it. At that point she was only a few weeks, it would have been simple. I reported to Toronto, wrote her a couple of letters. I couldn't telephone her at home. Then I got busy and lost touch. The next thing I heard—"

McGarry hadn't a lot of sympathy for Atkinson's reaction. "You might well look troubled. You should see the anger bottled up in young Bella."

"I'd rather not."

"You're going to. When she told me the name of the man she's after, I admitted I know you. She wants me to arrange a meeting."

The announcer pushed away his empty plate. "What's the point?" His good humor was reasserting itself. "Will I require a bulletproof vest?"

"I don't think she has a gun. She's been saving money. She asked me how she could go about hiring some guys to beat you up."

"Naturally you volunteered."

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"I told her it isn't easy. She'd have to know somebody like our friend Roscoe Gershwin." McGarry glanced at the restaurant owner, who was arguing with the pastry chef over the cherry cheesecake.

"Thanks a lot."

"I was drunk."

"What were you drinking, sodium pentathol? What other truths did you offer this lethal little lady?"

"Only that I believe you should talk—that I'd set up a meeting."

"Just after I come back from my holiday in Patagonia."

McGarry met Bella on a bench in Dominion Square at four o'clock in the afternoon. She came at a swift pace, looking bouncy and youthful in short-sleeved blouse and peasant skirt, ankle socks and polished loafers. She placed herself beside him, her eyes half closed against the sunlight. He had time to observe the downy texture of her upper lip, the healthy gleam of her braided chestnut hair. He found her very desirable today.

"Do you have to go to work?"

"No, I was on the early shift. When you phoned, the boss let me go." She put her chin down, looked at him under feathery eyelashes. "Did you fix a meeting?"

"Kevin will be at the room in a while."

She took a deep breath and let it out slowly. "That's very good. Thanks, Mike." She touched his hand and he took the excuse to hold her chubby fingers and said to her,

"I've been thinking about Denise. I don't believe you can blame her suicide entirely on Kevin."

"Why not?"

"Because suicide isn't like that. All right, she was depressed about being pregnant and her lover going away, but there must have been a lot of hostility in her."

"Didn't she have a right to be hostile?"

"Yes, but she also had a responsibility to stay alive the way we all do. To make use of her life."

"She did make use of it. Maybe you want to drag your life out as long as you can. Denise chose to spend hers all in one go."

They began walking toward the room on Drummond Street. Still holding Bella's hand, McGarry was enjoying himself. She surprised him by saying sharply, "You didn't warn Atkinson I'm out to get him?"

"In fact, I did."

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"I wish you hadn't. I want to get close to him. When they come to take him apart, I want to be there to see it."

"Wrong, Bella. There's no good in that. You two have to discuss how you feel and understand you're just a couple of ordinary people. Let's get rid of the high drama."

Moving nervously around the room, McGarry managed to find three glasses. Bella rinsed them at the sink and was drying them when he held the bottle up to the light. "Did we drink that much last night?"

"*You* drank that much."

"I'll have to get more."

"It isn't a party, Mike," she said. "Put away the booze. You aren't going to make me go easy on him."

Kevin Atkinson knocked at the door and McGarry let him in. "You two know each other," he said tentatively. They stood yards apart, the potential building until McGarry wouldn't have been surprised to see a white spark leap between them.

"You've changed, Bella."

"You aren't what I remember either."

"I hear you're mad at me."

"Do you blame me?"

"Not a bit." Atkinson moved closer to her. "I wanted to come to the funeral."

"But Toronto was a big hundred miles away," she said sarcastically.

"Listen. When your telegram arrived I was about to step on a plane. I was off to do a feature at the Calgary Stampede. There was a whole crew on the way and I was the only voice. I had to go." They were face to face now. Eye to eye. "Did you receive the flowers I sent?"

"And the card with the sentiment. You were always good with words."

"I meant what I wrote."

"I used to lie in my bedroom and listen through the open window to you down in the garden with Denise. You spoke very distinctly so she could read your lips."

"I didn't know you were—"

"All those romantic words. I was fourteen. I used to close my eyes and imagine the famous Kevin Atkinson was saying it to me."

McGarry sensed a diminishing of tension. He poured three drinks,

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emptying the bottle. "Here," he said, putting glasses in their hands. "Have this."

"I can't get over how you look," Atkinson said. "You were just a kid."

"A girl changes a lot between fourteen and twenty."

"The Baytown boys must be kicking themselves since you came to Montreal."

"I had no time for them. You were the one I wanted to find."

"So you could have me done away with."

"That was the idea. Now that I see you, you don't seem so wicked. What I carried in my mind isn't what you are."

McGarry tipped the empty bottle over his glass. "I'm going to duck around the corner and get some booze," he said. "Don't go away."

As he went out the door, he heard Atkinson saying, "I can't get over it. You're like a different version of Denise—younger and fresher."

McGarry hurried to the liquor store, bought two bottles, and headed back. For once in his life he had done absolutely the right thing. The girl would hardly go through with her plan for having Atkinson beaten by hired thugs, not now that they were talking and drinking together. McGarry saw himself treating Bella to a celebratory dinner this evening. Maybe Kevin would be able to come along and they would laugh about what had been a dicey situation.

He put his key in the lock and turned it, then was so startled when the door opened only an inch and slammed against the safety chain that he almost dropped the bottles in their paper bag. He tried the door again, puzzling stupidly over why the chain was on.

"Kev?"

"Halloo!" The voice was muffled, struggling for control.

"Are you all right?"

"Very good, sir. Never been better."

McGarry felt hot blood suffusing his face as he understood at last what was going on and how idiotically he was behaving. "Well, I've got this booze here—"

"Terrific. If you could come back in about half an hour, we can all have a drink." Some whispering went on and then Atkinson said, "Make it an hour."

McGarry closed the door and went away. He sat on a bench in Dominion Square with the bag of bottles balanced on his lap. The sun went down and he became cold. When he tried to move, a leg was asleep and his arms were aching from holding one position. He

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limped along Dorchester Boulevard and up Drummond to the rooming house, approaching the door of his place like an animal suspecting a trap.

The room was empty. He moved about by fading daylight, straightening the bedclothes, finding a glass and rinsing it. Then he propped two pillows behind his back and lay drinking, watching the brick wall outside the window go to black.

McGarry arrived at The Blue River at ten o'clock. He had made up his mind what he was going to say to Bella. When she came to serve him, he said, "Can you come over to a booth and have a drink with me?"

"I'm not allowed to leave the bar. How many have you already had?"

"I'm not drunk, I'm disturbed."

"What's the matter?"

"You know what's the matter." When she said nothing, when she stood with her arms folded, looking at him as severely as Britannia ruling the waves, he said, "Coming back and finding the two of you at it."

"You manage to make it sound disgusting. It was nothing like that."

"What happened to your revenge?"

"I don't feel that way now." Her face softened. "You were right. Once I met Kevin on a proper basis, the hate went away."

"As easy as that?"

"It was never his fault. He told Denise a long time ahead about his move to Toronto. The pregnancy was deliberate, her attempt to keep him in Baytown. She was supposed to be taking precautions."

"So now it's your sister's fault."

"Denise was always determined to get her way. I grew up knowing that."

McGarry toyed with his drink. It was odd to feel sober at this time of the evening—he was making decisions as clearly as if he were deciding the Maritimes test market. "Bella, you must sense how I feel about you."

"You've been good to me."

"Because I care about you. Last night was something special. I know not much happened, but just sleeping with you, seeing you there when I got up— And this afternoon in the square—"

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"Mike, I'm sorry." There was a childish simplicity about her shrug and the regretful smile. "I don't feel the same."

"I don't intend to walk away. I can't."

"You'll have to. Kevin and I will probably get married."

It was too fast, too hard. What the hell did Atkinson think he was up to? "I'd better have a word with friend Kevin."

"Leave him alone."

"My boss at Associated Distillers is a major CJCF shareholder. If I say the right things, Atkinson could be posted to North Bay next week."

"Don't try it."

McGarry looked at the illuminated clock and pushed away from the bar. "Is that the right time? I've got to cut out the late hours."

"Leave us alone, Mike. I'm warning you."

McGarry drove home in the slow lane, letting every light turn red, idling at intersections, thinking. He was not sure he could have Atkinson fired, but the threat might be enough. He thought he knew Kevin well enough to suspect he was only playing with Bella. Once the announcer knew McGarry was serious about the girl he would probably drop her.

Iris was up when he let himself in. She was at her desk in the library, proofreading the program for next winter's series of concerts by the symphony orchestra. She handed the cover design to her husband. "Do you like it? I talked the agency into doing the artwork and typesetting for nothing."

The cover was dominated by the handsome face of Patel, the charismatic conductor. "A great shot of Mowgli. I hear he thrives on hero-worship."

"Give it back. Your crass irreverence does you no credit."

"Any more coffee in the pot?"

"Help yourself."

He found a late movie listed in the television guide, an old British effort about the Scottish inhabitants of an island who steal hundreds of cases of whisky from a wrecked freighter. He and Iris had seen it first time around at the cinema. They watched it now, laughing out loud, grabbing hands. In bed later, falling asleep, McGarry wondered how he had been lucky enough to end up with such a good woman. And why he was impelled to fall around bars late at night, courting disaster.

He was at his desk in the Distillers building when the switchboard

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rang through and told him Mr. Atkinson was on the line. He waited for the connection to be made. "Morning, Kevin. I'm glad you called, I want to talk to you."

"I understand we have a problem over a woman. Pikestaffs at forty paces."

"You've been talking to Bella."

"She tells me you were upset by what happened yesterday at the room." There was a brief silence on the line. "I was as surprised by it as you were, old friend."

"But not as bothered. We have to get straight on this."

"By all means."

"I care about her, Kev. I didn't introduce her to you so you could go to bed with her."

"That's unfortunate."

"For you."

"No, for you, Mike. None of us can dictate how we're going to feel about somebody. But it's serious between me and Bella."

"Not yet, it can't be. Don't see her any more."

"Beyond my control."

"Not beyond mine. I've been looking at the arrangements for the sales meeting in September. I think I may bring in somebody else to do the entertainment."

Atkinson's laugh over the phone was a harsh metallic sound. "Bring in the Ritz Brothers," he said. "I hope you'll be happy together."

Three minutes later, while McGarry was still trembling, the telephone rang again. "It's me." It was Bella.

"What a coincidence. If I were to ask to speak to Kevin, I suppose you could hand him the phone."

"Come into the bar tonight and see me, Mike."

"What for?"

"It's important. Will you do it?"

Part of him wanted to tell her to get lost. Another part wanted to cry on her shoulder. "I'll be there around ten," he said and hung up.

Bella was pouring herself a coffee at the end of the bar. There was a party of four in one of the booths, a couple of singles perched on lopsided stools. McGarry walked into the devilish red glow of the bar light and put down a dollar. All that was necessary, he told himself, was for him to have stayed the hell out of here the other

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night and none of this heartache would be happening. Yet, truthfully, he was enjoying the excitement.

She came to him carrying the Three Eagles over ice, pushed the water carafe his way, took his money, and brought the few cents' change. "Thanks for coming."

"What's the difference? Have you changed your mind about Atkinson?"

"I love him, Mike."

"Just like that?"

"You expect me to love *you,* just like that."

"It's different. We met accidentally. Strangers. We went out and ate together, talked, you came to the room with me."

"I don't see how that—"

"Bella, you *knew* him. Damn it, you'd come after him to fix him. That's why I brought you to see him. You can't just turn it around."

"It happened."

McGarry took a stiff drink. "If my feelings are going to be messed around like this, Bella, I'm going to react. I'll have my revenge." He nodded his head as she raised her eyes. "You know all about revenge, eh?"

"Don't hurt Kevin."

"I've already decided to cut him out of my sales meeting. And that's only the beginning."

"He told me." She went away, got a bottle of beer from a cabinet, opened it, and partially refilled a customer's glass. When she came back, she said, "Give him back the job, Mike. Don't hurt his career."

"Go to hell, Bella," McGarry said as perfunctorily as if he had been inviting her to keep the change.

He saw her use the telephone behind the bar. Good, let her tell Kevin the appeal had been thrown out of court. She eyed him as she talked, memorizing him, and, at the same time, dismissing him.

McGarry nursed his drink for almost an hour to show he was not being driven away. Then he left The Blue River and went out onto the street. As he passed the alley on the way to where his car was parked, a quiet voice called, "McGarry?"

He turned and moved toward the man without thinking. By the time he realized what was about to happen, by the time fear flooded his stomach, it was too late—the man had his arm, another came from the shadows and took him at the other side, and they dragged him, heels scraping, to the end of the alley.

The beating hardly lasted a minute, expert blows distributed over

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his body to leave him with days of bruises and pain. They left him on the pavement, jackknifed, protecting himself. One of them bent over him. "You're to leave the radio guy alone—okay? Or next time it's worse." He stood and put the boot in and McGarry felt a rib go.

He managed to walk slowly to his room and let himself in. He couldn't go home in this condition. Iris would ask questions, would become righteously angry, and there would be no way he could avoid the police coming around to interview him. He checked his face in the mirror—they'd left that part of him alone. He would sleep here tonight, see in the morning if he could live with the cracked rib. To visit a doctor and be taped would mean questions at home.

McGarry lay on the bed and closed his eyes. He was beginning to slide under when somebody knocked at the door.

"Who is it?"

"Kevin. Are you all right?"

"You know how I am."

"It wasn't me, Mike. It was Bella." A silence. "I never thought she'd do something like this."

"You're in with a Baytown girl, old friend. Good luck."

"I forgot what they're like. Will you open the door?"

McGarry let Atkinson in, showed him the marks of the beating, poured two drinks. They talked. Later the radio announcer drove his friend to Rodrigo's Restaurant, where they located Roscoe Gershwin in his office. "Take a good look," Atkinson concluded after he had filled in the background. "This is what your boys did to my friend."

The restaurant manager was appalled. "She was a cute kid. Tough, but cute. She gave your name as a reference, Kevin. She had the money—cash. I gave her a number to call. I had no idea it was you, Mike. She said some guy had done her sister."

"Well, now you know."

Gershwin looked thoughtful. "You say she works at The Blue River? I know the owner. Let me make a phone call." As he dialed, he said, "Do you want her hurt, Mike?"

"Only gone." As he said it, McGarry experienced a miserable sense of loss.

The summer concert series of the Montreal Symphony was in full swing. Iris was elated over the size of the audiences—she was thinking of laying on a couple of extra performances, including one out-

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doors at the Lookout on Mount Royal if she could only guarantee the weather.

"How long are you going to be away?" she asked her husband as he put his luggage in the car. "I'd love you to attend the Berlioz on Friday night."

"I'm not sure I'll be back. Sometimes I think the Ontario sales force is stupid on purpose. Memos and phone calls don't work. I have to go and see them."

Driving west on Highway 401, McGarry reflected that his statement to Iris wasn't entirely a lie. He had been on the telephone recently to his most trusted representative in Ontario. The man had visited Baytown and asked a few questions around the drinking spots. A girl named Bella Ford was working behind the bar in a place outside town called The Maples.

He would arrive there, park the car, walk in and order a drink from her. What happened next would be in the lap of the gods. All effects of the beating had long since passed away, but McGarry knew the ache inside brought about by Bella's absence was never going to leave him.

The Maples. He hadn't been there before. Picking up speed through the Ontario farmland, McGarry let his mind dwell expectantly on what sort of bar this one would be, and whether he would start with a couple of beers or go straight to the whisky.

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a *NEW* short story by

ROBERT TWOHY

A zany tale about Brenda and Roy and Frank and Lucy and about the hot water they got themselves into, one of them literally and to his great misfortune.

In the November 3, 1980 issue of EQMM we published Robert Twohy's "Tomorrow We Finish Ann." We love his use of the verb "finish" in that story and in the one to come . . .

A SOMEWHAT HAPPY ENDING

by ROBERT TWOHY

Brenda Frassup got home from the dentist and went upstairs to rinse out her mouth, but forgot about it the moment she stepped into the bathroom because the first thing she saw, on the tiles near the tub, was her new lightweight carving knife, blade all red.

Second thing to hit her was that the tub was full of red water, from which poked a couple of fat white knees.

"Roy?"

Lying low in the water she could vaguely make out the porky shape of her husband.

But Roy was in Cleveland, not due home until Friday. This was Wednesday.

But often he'd cut a business trip short. And always on return from Cleveland his first act was to take a bath.

Near the knife lay a heap of clothes—greenish shirt, shorts, blue slacks, purple socks—Roy never had any sense of what colors went with what.

Brenda looked at the still water and fiddled with her neat little chin, pondering. Who would have come sneaking in and stabbed him? Frank?

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No, Frank had no call to get drastic—Roy was away on business trips most of the time. (He was an industrial-waste executive.) He hardly got in the way of Brenda and Frank's long-running affair.

Who then? *Someone* had finished him, that was for sure.

Well, whoever—it was the cops' problem. The bottom line was that with Roy dead the stylish house, the Mercedes, both bank accounts, all the stocks and bonds, and everything in the safe-deposit box now belonged to her. Plus, on his $500,000 insurance policy she had hit Big Casino. So her twelve-year-old marriage had wound up really well.

No doubt early in the afternoon Roy had called from the airport to tell her to pick him up. But she was at the dentist, so he'd come home by cab—and was all by himself for the killer.

A smile touched her pretty if somewhat sharp-featured face. Things work out, sometimes.

She went downstairs, got the number of the police from the operator, and when she dialed a man answered and asked what was the problem.

She told him.

He got Roy's name, and hers, and their classy address. "You sure he's dead?"

"Yes. There were no bubbles or anything."

"What kind of knife is it?"

"It's got a narrow blade, about eight inches long, comes to a point almost—so you can get between close bones without having to gouge, y'know? The handle's real nice, kind of artistic-looking. Swedish-made, I think."

The man said that some men would be over and not to touch anything. She promised she wouldn't.

She sat back on the couch and looked around the niftily furnished living room and felt not bad at all.

But Frank should get word of what had happened so he'd know that their affair better go on the shelf for a while.

She called his office (he worked at a pest-repellent plant) and in a cold voice like a bill-collector, the voice she always used when she called him at work, she asked if she could speak to Mr. O'Zonickle.

A wait, then: "He seems to be out. Can I take a message?"

Brenda said coldly that she'd call later.

Which meant that she'd have to try him at home, which meant that she'd probably get Lucy. But at least Lucy would pass him the

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word about Roy's murder and Frank would know he was being signaled to cool things for the nonce.

Lucy's dumb voice came on during the fourth ring. "Yuh? Who?"

"Brenda. Were you taking a nap?"

"Yuh. Whuh time zit?"

"After four."

"Whuff. Gotta start thinking of dinner. Frank said he might be home early. Whuz new, Brenda?"

Brenda and Lucy had been friends since each was a young married, before industrial waste caught on, carrying the Frassups up and away from the tacky old neighborhood where the O'Zonickles still lived. The women remained friends, more or less, and saw each other from time to time. Brenda was sure that Lucy, with her remarkably low IQ, had no idea of the ongoing thing with Frank. Nobody else knew about it either. It had been kept very low-profile.

Brenda said, "Roy's been murdered."

"Who?"

"Roy."

"Been what?"

"Murdered."

"You're kidding."

"No. He's in the tub under the water, which is all bloody—which my new lightweight carving knife, which is on the floor by the tub, is too. I was out and somebody sneaked in and got the knife from the kitchen drawer and went up and stabbed him."

A sudden coughing spasm hit Lucy. "You all right?" asked Brenda.

"Yuh. I'm s'prised is all. So Roy's dead in the water. That's terrible." Another spasm.

Brenda said somewhat sharply, "What's all the coughing?"

"Smoking too much prob'ly. Better stop talking. G'bye. I'm sorry to hear the news. Anything I or Frank can do, lemme know." She hung up.

Brenda sat fiddling with her chin. Odd—mixed in with the coughs had been sounds like giggling.

What was funny?

The phone rang. She picked it up, said "hello," and heard, "Brenda?"

It was like she'd read in a suspense story once—an icy hand seemed to grasp her heart. Another phrase, "it couldn't be," spun around in her head—it simply could not *be!*

"Brenda?"

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It had to be someone mimicking Roy's voice. He lay upstairs in the red water.

"Brenda? D'you hear me? I'm calling from Cleveland. It's a jungle here. I'll be home tomorrow, flight blah-blah-blah, meet me at the airport, blah-blah-blah."

There could be no doubt. No mimic could get so exactly the particular soupy, sickening sinus whistle that came with his words.

She said, "Who's in the bathtub?"

"What?"

"If you're in Cleveland, who's in the bathtub?"

"What are you talking about?"

"Someone's in the bathtub."

"What bathtub?"

Frank's sense of what colors went with what was as gross as Roy's!

"Brenda, what the hell's going on?"

An afternoon not long ago she'd got up and half noticed purple socks in his heap of clothes by the bed.

She set the phone back on its cradle, went up and into the bathroom, looked at the socks, then at the two vacuous-looking knees. They told her nothing—knees had never meant anything to her.

She turned up her cuffs, knelt, reached, hooked hair, and hauled. The hair was sand-colored. She'd have liked a different color.

She hauled harder. The head popped up. Frank O'Zonickle's blue eyes gazed at her, sheepish, like he felt like two cents to be here in this condition.

She let go and the head slid back under.

The phone was ringing.

She went down and stood looking at it until it got quiet. Roy had finally given up trying to find out what was going on.

Brenda sat on the couch, dialed. Lucy's voice—"Yuh?"

"You knew all the time."

"Knew what?"

"That it was Frank."

"What was Frank?"

"In the tub."

"With Roy?"

"Roy's not in the tub. Just Frank."

"You said it was Roy."

"All I saw was the knees. Then Roy called from Cleveland and I pulled the head up and it's Frank. *Stop that lousy coughing!*"

"So Frank ducks off work and comes sneaking like Sylvester the

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Cat to your place, and starts making himself all pretty and sweet—and you come home and find a gone goose. I love it!"

Brenda thought dully, he never took a bath here before—why'd he do it today?

Lucy gradually cheered down. Her tone got sly. "Wait a minute, there's something fishy. Wait, I'm getting it. I've got it. Here's what happened—you came home and saw from the rear this fat glob sitting in the tub, and—yeah, that's it—it was all steamy prob'ly and you didn't see clear, you weren't expecting Frank, he'd sneaked over to give you an afternoon s'prise party, so you thought it was Roy back from Cleveland. From the rear naked they'd look alike, yards of pork, 'cept Roy's bald and Frank has hair—sorry, *had* hair—" She spasmed briefly, then resumed. "But he was prob'ly soaping his head so in the steam he looked bald. You flashed on the big inheritance you'd get, freaked out, ran down to the kitchen, grabbed your new carving knife, ran back, and— I've got it, don't I? Isn't that how it happened?"

She tacked on, purrily, "It'll be in'resting to see how you try to lie your way out of it."

Brenda took a deep breath to calm herself, but it didn't help. She screamed, "*You're* the liar! Pretending to believe it was Roy when you knew it was Frank all the time!"

"How could I?"

"Because you followed him—like you've probably done before!"

"I don't have a car—he takes the car!"

"By cab then! You saw him leave work and come here and go in the back door with the key I gave him. You followed him in—"

"How?"

"He always forgets—forgot—to lock the door after him.

"You heard the bath water, sneaked upstairs, peeked in, saw him in the tub, figgered it'd be real cute to finish him and hang it on me, ran down to the kitchen, got my new carving knive, ran back, and stabbed him!"

"So that's gonna be your lie, is it? Well, lemme tell you, they'll see right through you!"

Brenda listened, said, "Door chimes."

"I heard."

"The cops. I'll tell them who's the killer!"

"You won't have to. They'll know by your lying eyes."

That was the beginning of the O'Zonickle case. And pretty much

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the end of it. The carving knife showed no fingerprints. Each woman said the other had put the three terminal holes in Frank's back. And the D.A. couldn't nail down which one was the liar.

Brenda's lawyer conferred with him and told him that dumb she was, but not so dumb as to think that stabbing her husband in their own bathtub with their own artistic carving knife made in Taiwan was something she could expect to get away with. The D.A. pointed out that it was O'Zonickle, not her husband, who had been stabbed. The lawyer conceded that, but said that the same reasoning applied. If for any private reason she wanted to finish off Frank, she'd have picked a different place and a less personal weapon.

Then Lucy's lawyer came to confer. He told the D.A. that even if Lucy *had* followed Frank to Brenda's, which she hadn't, she couldn't possibly have expected that he'd plop his fat frame into the tub and be a sitting goose there—so why would she have gone in the house after him? How could she think she'd get advantage over him? He outweighed her by ninety pounds.

The D.A. forbore suggesting that maybe she'd followed him countless times, just waiting for the one time that things would break right, with Brenda off somewhere, her Mercedes not in the driveway, and that day had come last Wednesday. He forbore suggesting it because if it was true, it was just blind luck, on which with no evidence you can't make a case.

Anyway, Lucy's attorney went on, there was no motive to hang on her. Frank's affair with Brenda was no big deal to her—she'd known of it for months and all she thought of it was two morons had found each other.

The house was gone over for clues but there were none—and no signs of forced entry. But Brenda's story that Frank always forgot to lock the back door meant that her lawyer could claim that anyone could have slipped in and done the murder, for whatever reason—or maybe, times being as they are, for no reason at all.

Some days passed. Frank got buried. Nothing was charged to Brenda or Lucy. No other suspects turned up.

The D.A. was an orderly man—he liked things symmetrical, which the O'Zonickle case wasn't. It ran on three legs, which was why it stumbled around and got nowhere. He added a fourth leg—Roy.

Brenda, Frank, Lucy, Roy—four people about equally devoid of redeeming qualities, thought the D.A. Like attracts like. Brenda and Frank had found each other. Why not Lucy and Roy?

The concept pleased him. It gave the case balance.

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But that was all it gave. Because a check of the local cab companies developed nothing. And clever questions asked around Roy's industrial-waste factory and around the two neighborhoods, the stylish one and the tacky one, turned up no one who knew of any affair between Roy and Lucy, or would say they did.

So the D.A. had no evidence of any kind. And no one was going to confess.

More days passed, and turned into weeks, then months. New murders took the spotlight. The O'Zonickle case was shoved into the enormous file marked UNSOLVED and became forgotten, even by the D.A.

But before forgetting it it would have been interesting if he'd learned that not many months after Frank passed away Roy divorced Brenda and, some time later, married Lucy.

Brenda got a settlement which, if it wasn't all she'd envisioned in those glorious minutes before Roy's call from Cleveland, wasn't altogether shabby either. And Roy got Lucy, who, for whatever weird reason, he apparently wanted. And she got *her* heart's desire of becoming a lady of position, living in the stylish house, and snubbing all her old friends. Her only regret was that she couldn't snub Brenda, who moved to southern California, where she's having a lively time no doubt.

So things worked out, if not perfectly, at least pleasantly for all but one of the people involved in the O'Zonickle case—which is about the most you can expect of any murder.

I think it's pleasing, in these cynical times, to come on a case with a somewhat happy ending.

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ELLERY QUEEN'S MYSTERY NEWSLETTER

CRIME BEAT

by R. E. PORTER

NEW FROM BOWLING GREEN: Was Agatha Christie ever published in *Black Mask,* the magazine that epitomized the American hard-boiled mystery for three decades? Before answering "Of course not!" you'd better consult E. R. Hagemann's *A Comprehensive Index to Black Mask, 1920–1951,* published by Bowling Green State University Popular Press (Bowling Green, Ohio 43403; $8.95 paper, $15.95 cloth). Though the existence of amateur indexes to *Black Mask* has been rumored for years, this is the first to be officially published, with annotations and information on series characters. And, yes, Agatha Christie's "The Face of Helen" (a Mr. Quin story) was reprinted in the final issue of *Black Mask,* July 1951.

Also new from Bowling Green is Ely M. Liebow's biography, *Dr. Joe Bell: Model for Sherlock Holmes* ($10.95 paper, $15.95 cloth). Though it contains examples of Bell's fabled deductive process, and tells of his links to Conan Doyle and Holmes, the book may prove more interesting to students of Nineteenth Century medicine than to readers of detective fiction.

NEW FROM SMALL PRESSES: Cordelia Editions (Santa Barbara, CA) has published *Early Millar: The First Stories of Ross Macdonald & Margaret Millar,* with a brief Introduction by Ralph B. Sipper. Both stories appeared in the same 1931 issue of the Millars' high school magazine. His was a five-page Sherlockian parody while hers was a two-page mood piece about a dying pianist. This is certainly a "must" for collectors, though $27.50 seems a bit high for a ten-page pamphlet. (A hardbound signed edition costs even more.)

A book listed as a "forgotten mystery" in my column of December 2, 1981, is forgotten no longer. Neville Press (835 Laguna Street, Santa Barbara, CA 93101) has published a signed unexpurgated edition of Jonathan Latimer's 1941 novel, *Solomon's Vineyard* ($35.00).

And Robert B. Parker's first short story about his private eye Spenser, *Surrogate,* has been published in a 27-page signed hardcover edition by Lord John Press (19073 Los

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Alimos St., Northridge, CA 91326; $38.00).

SERIES SLEUTH: Historians of the detective short story should note the appearance of a new series sleuth who has slipped up on us virtually unnoticed. He's the unnamed American consul who narrates the twenty stories in Paul Theroux's *The Consul's File* (1977). Several of the tales deal with crime or the supernatural in Malaysia, and at least one—"The Johore Murders"—is a detective story. The consul, now stationed in London, returned to detection in "A Tomb with a View" (*Harper's Magazine,* September 1982), one of several new adventures collected in *The London Embassy,* to be published by Houghton Mifflin early in 1983.

SHORT STORIES IN ENGLAND: Single-author collections of mystery short stories seem rarer with each passing year in America. I can think of only four published here in all of 1982. Happily, they continue to thrive in England, where recent months have seen publication of *The Agatha Christie Hour* by Agatha Christie (Collins), *The McBain Brief* by Ed McBain (Hamish Hamilton), *The Fever Tree & Other Stories* by Ruth Rendell (Hutchinson), *The Tigers of Subtopia & Other Stories* by Julian Symons (Macmillan), and even *Uncollected Stories* by Arthur Conan Doyle (Secker & Warburg). Let's hope they appear here soon.

JOHN D. MacDONALD: Frederick Ungar's excellent "Recognitions" series continues with *John D. MacDonald,* a critical study by David Geherin ($6.95 paper, $11.95 cloth). After two chapters on MacDonald's early work and non-series best sellers, Geherin concentrates on the first nineteen books in the Travis McGee series. A bibliography and index are included.

COMING ATTRACTIONS: Allen J. Hubin is completing work on *Crime Fiction, 1749–1980, A Comprehensive Bibliography,* an updating and expansion of his Edgar-winning volume *The Bibliography of Crime Fiction* (1979). The new book, due from Garland Publishing late in 1983, adds some 7,000 titles to the first version and includes an index of principal settings, a series character chronology, and a key to reference works containing biographical information about the authors listed.

Otto Penzler's Mysterious Press scores a major coup this spring with publication of Stanley Ellin's controversial new novel, *The Dark Fantastic.* It's the first new novel to be published by The Mysterious Press, and Jonathan Cape will be bringing it out at the same time in England. And look for a new Ellin short story in the March issue of *EQMM.*

Editors Bill Pronzini and Martin H. Greenberg are polling members of the Mystery Writers of America on their all-time favorite short stories for an anthology titled *The Mystery Hall of Fame.* It'll be published in 1983 by Morrow.

My fellow columnist Jon L. Breen has sold his first mystery novel, *Listen for the Click,* to Walker. It'll be published this spring.

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BLOODY VISIONS

by CHRIS STEINBRUNNER

He had the face of a deformed cherub, and his voice carried a menacing, silken lisp. Peter Lorre was an unlikely figure of mystery—short, not particularly strong-looking nor gruff—yet the actor across an international career graced an interesting, memorable lineup of thrillers. A new book, *The Films of Peter Lorre,* written by a trio of scholars (Stephen Youngkin, James Bigwood, and Raymond Cabana, Jr.), is the first detailed study of the actor and his roles, a welcome and important investigation of the character player often at the sinister core of Hollywood's most enduring melodramas.

Actually, the Hungarian-born Lorre got his film start in Berlin. He had been playing a feeble-minded young student in a Bertolt Brecht stage drama, a role touching both hysteria and melancholy, the qualities Fritz Lang wanted for his child-murderer in *M.* Lang convinced Lorre to take the part, even though the actor felt himself too short and pudgy to be movie material. He was an immediate success—so much so, people shunned him at restaurants and on the street. His close identification with mystery and the bizarre had begun. Interestingly, Lang had cast him because he looked *incapable* of murder.

M was released in 1931. For the next three years Lorre's roles in German films ranged from hunchbacks to police detectives. Then he traveled to England to play a terrorist in Alfred Hitchcock's first version of *The Man Who Knew Too Much.* His next destination was America, and a contract with Columbia Studios.

During the remainder of the Thirties he would do parts for a variety of Hollywood film companies. He played the morbidly insane Dr. Gogol in M-G-M's *Mad Love,* a Grand Guignol version of "The Hands of Orlac." He was the sensitive, neurotic student turning to murder in *Crime and Punishment,* a film Lorre had insisted that Columbia make. He returned briefly to England for Hitchcock's *Secret Agent,* portraying the ruthless killer known as "The Hairless Mexican"—laughing sinisterly when he learns the wrong man has by mistake been pushed off a mountain. For Fox he began a series of films featuring John P. Marquand's ubiquitous Japanese sleuth, Mr. I. A. Moto—and it is a tribute to Lorre's acting skills that with very little makeup he was able to make the scholarly little Oriental believable. For sure, Moto mingled often in such Western settings as modern art museums and industrialists' mansions, so that his soft Asian origins need not be too exact, but we find him several times in Limehouse and Chinatown as well, and even in these oriental communes Lorre's portrayal of Moto

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does not seem too far out of place.

Moto was a quiet, diminutive fellow who liked milk and cats but who would not hesitate to kill when necessary. Most of Lorre's other roles in the late Thirties were villains. Two stand out: the scruffy street maniac in *Stranger on the Third Floor* and the immigrant watchmaker, disfigured in a fire, who becomes the leader of a gang in *The Face Behind the Mask*. Both films (and especially the latter, in which Lorre is a sympathetic criminal and doomed) are forerunners of the *film noir* mood. For Lorre, however, they were program features further type-casting him as a player in melodrama potboilers.

Then John Huston, a screenwriter beginning his first film as director, offered Lorre a second chance at immortality: the role of Joel Cairo in his 1941 version of *The Maltese Falcon*. Huston felt the actor caught Cairo's ambiguity: "Peter had an international air about him. You never knew quite where he was from." The hulking Sydney Greenstreet was cast as Lorre's crime associate; the two made such an engaging, disparate team that the Warner Studio put them together often—generally as spies or gangsters. They were coupled onscreen in Eric Ambler's *Background to Danger*, as well as his *The Mask of Dimitrios* (in which Lorre plays the mystery-writer hero), in such interesting films as *The Verdict* (based on Zangwill's classic locked-room puzzle, *The Big Bow Mystery*), but most importantly in the timeless *Casablanca*. Lorre also appeared in two Cornell Woolrich thrillers, *Black Angel* and *The Chase* (from *The Black Path of Fear*).

In latter years Lorre presented a screen image that was almost a caricature of his former roles: always worth watching, yet seldom memorable. But his petty crook in Huston's black comedy, *Beat the Devil*, or his driven, mad murderer in the heavily psychological *Beast with Five Fingers* made up for much. Peter Lorre died in 1964, active in film and television almost to his last day, behind him more than three decades of exquisite villainy.

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INTERVIEW: JAMES POWELL (2)

This is the conclusion of an interview that began in the previous issue.

EQMN: How different is life in your Pennsylvania town from New York City?

POWELL: When I lived in Manhattan, a good walk around the block or two was good for clearing the head. Here I can get up from the desk, grab the binoculars, and in five minutes be over the railroad tracks and down on the river bank. At the turn of the century the in-

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habitants dumped their garbage at the foot of their streets for the spring flood to carry away. So what I am crouching on is a layer of earth over fifty years of garbage. I am looking down on the Susquehanna River and sand bars overgrown with weeds. Ten miles upriver is Three Mile Island. Behind me is a path trail-bikers use. Beyond it and the railroad tracks is the noise of a plant that converts empty beer cans into aluminum ingots. A woman's voice on a loudspeaker is calling Herb to the telephone. Below me on a sand bar decorated with rubber tires three great egrets with long orange beaks and long black legs are preening themselves. When I come back tomorrow there will be a litter of feathers where they stood. Such messy things those egrets are.

EQMN: Your work reflects a great range and depth of knowledge and feeling. Do you read a great deal? Travel?

POWELL: Lucky enough to travel when I had young rubber bones, I must stay home now because I can't afford the comforts I need. But a good atlas, a magnifying glass, and Hakluyt's *Voyages* will get you far. I do like to read. But if I read as much as people say, why does the list of books I want to read keep getting longer? Nineteenth and Twentieth Century history, biography, and travel are my current interests. I also like the poets of the same period and of now. I think prose writers should read poetry. I'm not sure what poets should read. Perhaps mystery stories.

EQMN: Your stories are superbly polished. Is writing a painstaking process for you?

POWELL: It's never been easy and it doesn't get any easier, though I don't have to talk myself into sitting down at the typewriter as much as I did. For me a story starts mostly as a vague shape. (With "Death in the Christmas Hour," I had been thinking for some time of the long-held belief that animals can talk for an hour at Christmas. And if animals can, why not toys?)

This is enough to start me pacing—outside on the walk if the weather's good, around the sofa if it isn't. I try to keep my mind as open as I can, and if I'm lucky the ideas will start to come. These beginnings are a lot of fun for me and if all goes well I'll soon be hugging myself like Johnson's Boswell. As the shape becomes more distinct, a facet of character or a bit of action or a sentence will emerge and get me to commit myself to the story. In the case of "Death in the Christmas Hour," it was Teddy saying "Onwards and upwards" because he was stuffed with excelsior.

The first two or three drafts are hard work. Then there is generally the draft in which all problems within the story are resolved, and that is satisfying. The last two drafts or so are for tightening and style. But by that time I am already pacing and, hopefully, hugging myself over the next story.

EQMN: You've said, "Both the funny story and the mystery travel down a strongly plotted road, all the while preparing the reader for the punch line, the unexpected ending which he must instantly

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understand was the only ending there ever could have been." Don't you find this a difficult road to engineer time after time?

POWELL: Somewhere midway in every story when the pacing gets mean, I swear I'll kick the cat across the room before writing another. But it's the same for everyone. There's always another story to write, or cow to milk, or time card to punch, or magazine to edit. The cat hasn't been punted yet. I wonder if it knows how close I've come.

EQMN: In which story did Acting Sergeant Maynard Bullock first appear?

POWELL: I had an urge to write a gothic mystery. It would involve mysterious doings in a Scottish castle reconstructed on the coast of Nova Scotia, strange visitors, flashing lights from submarines offshore, and Jake Beddoes, a discredited Madison Avenue advertising magnate with great personal charm. This was "The Beddoes Scheme," a kind of benevolent conspiracy, I suppose. The narrator has rented the gatehouse of the castle for the summer. Bullock's appearance, a scarlet shape flitting among the trees, was supposed to add to the early mystery and later to suggest that high personages in the Canadian government had fallen under Beddoes' spell. Obliged to investigate reports of strange goings-on, they had assigned the one Mountie they knew would never come up with anything. In such a modest capacity Bullock was born. But I quickly made him a star.

EQMN: Is it true his only vice is a weakness for bubble baths?

POWELL: Like all of us, Bullock has many vices. But he only acknowledges them one at a time. He likes stacks of toast and tea for breakfast and the marmalade that comes in little stone pots, the study of phrenology, their summer cottage on Black Fly Lake, and his Edsel, which he was so proud of when he bought it new and which he now tells people who ask that it's a Skoda Runabout.

EQMN: Heaven knows the man is dedicated.

POWELL: No more than a Mountie should be. And this is the heart of Bullock's character. In his quiet moments he may marvel that he has achieved a dream of childhood. But the fact is, he is a Mountie. He has the uniform to prove it. And Mounties are dedicated and fearless and they always get their man. And that's how he must be, too. If he sometimes appears condescending or conceited or even arrogant, it is because he is a Mountie and we are not. And so he pities us. I have a very special affection for Bullock. He is the only one of my characters who is not smarter than I am. But his stories don't come easily. Blunder is harder to write about than brilliance.

EQMN: Whom do you see playing Bullock in a movie or on TV somewhere down the line? Robert Redford? Sid Caesar?

POWELL: For a long time I imagined Burt Lancaster in the part for I suspect a sense of humor in the man. But he may not want to wear a cap with bells. Perhaps another Burt. If Burt Reynolds

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would leave the women alone for a bit, stand up straight, and take Spielberg's direction, I think Burt, Steve, and I might have a handy little property.

EQMN: Any closing comments regarding having a sense of humor and writing humor?

POWELL: A sense of humor, like any function of imagination, makes you the center of young attention, and when the eternal question arises, "Hey, what are we going to do now?" you are probably the one turned to. That's addictive. Today it doesn't take any real toll because it's the way I am. My real fear is to intrude my lightness on someone's real distress. At the same time, I think most people take themselves and what they do much too seriously. Solemnity is the wit of fools. And what the solemn owls blinking in their niches will do when real problems arrive I don't know. —Unfortunately, I also believe that we should be wary of anyone whose philosophy of life at all resembles his character. Five will get you ten the character came first and the philosophy was trimmed to fit it.

As for what my reader expects, I believe writing is two imaginations touching. I'm sure he will accept me as funny, mysterious, offbeat, or even solemn, provided the writing is good and if early on I give him a hint which gate I'm trying to run him through.

THE JURY BOX

by JON L. BREEN

Michael Gilbert once wrote that a thriller is more difficult to write than a detective story. This may seem a heresy to puzzle lovers, but since Gilbert is adept at both types of crime novel, his opinion must be respected. And his latest novel, more thriller than detective story, has a sophistication of technique and intricacy of design that suggest a Gilbert thriller may indeed take more care and skill than most people's detective novels. Not that the effort shows unless looked for.

**** Michael Gilbert: *End-Game,* Harper and Row, $13.50. This could be called a business thriller, not technically espionage but with the same wheels-within-wheels feeling. Central characters are a charming Welsh rogue and his ex-girlfriend, a secretary fast rising in the mysterious Randall Blackett's financial conglomerate. Gilbert, casually knowledgeable in many areas, offers sidelights on coach tours, the ink trade, drug dealing, and the world of British tramps. His style is cool, smooth, and unflamboyant, and he has absolute command of an involved, surprising plot. More proof he is one of the best in the business, detecting or thrilling.

*** James Ellroy: *Clandestine,* Avon, $2.95. This ambitious crime

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novel, believably set in Los Angeles of the Fifties, gives a grim picture of police excesses and political pressures of the time. Ambitious young cop Fred Underhill, his career destroyed by his involvement in the search for a strangler of women, tries again as a private citizen years later. The novel is overwritten at times, a little too self-consciously literary, especially in the wearying references to "the wonder," but Ellroy's storytelling knack will hold most readers to the end.

*** John Buxton Hilton: *The Sunset Law,* St. Martin's, $9.95. The visit of retired Scotland Yard sleuth Simon Kenworthy to Florida proves a profound exception to the rule that British detectives should not take American vacations. Hilton has a relatively good ear for American speech and his bleak view of Florida is at least free of solecisms obvious to a Californian. The story is absorbing from its troubled domestic opening to its low-key-Bondian climax.

*** Jack Livingston: *A Piece of the Silence,* St. Martin's, $13.95. Joe Binney is a likeable and realistically presented deaf private eye—the problems he faces and the ways he solves them ring true. The style is partly reminiscent of all the other first person PIs in fiction and partly unique. The strength here is in the telling, the characterizations, and some very good action sequences. The plot, though complicated enough, is just okay. Livingston is the pseudonym of a "published novelist," says the jacket.

*** James Melville: *The Chrysanthemum Chain,* St. Martin's, $9.95. This witty and graceful novel is a travelogue mystery in the least pejorative sense of the term. The illuminating view of Japanese politics, society, and daily life outweighs the comparatively routine plot. The locale is Kobe, where a British subject has been murdered. East/West protagonists are Superintendent Otani of the Prefectural Police and Andrew Walker of the British Consulate.

*** Claire McCormick: *Résumé for Murder,* Walker, $11.95. John Waltz, who recruits college seniors for executive trainee positions, turns amateur detective at a conservative small college in Pennsylvania. In a strong debut, McCormick writes in a breezy, satirical style and delivers the most unfettered lampoon on the excesses of some evangelical Christians I've seen in a mystery novel.

*** Elizabeth Lemarchand: *Troubled Waters,* Walker, $11.95. Here is a prime English village mystery (complete with map) about the ostensibly accidental death of a young American come to search out his British roots with the help of a local genealogist. The likeable Yard team of Pollard and Toye investigate in the best book I've read by this author.

** Gladys Mitchell: *Uncoffin'd Clay,* St. Martin's, $9.95. In a less engaging village mystery, Dame Beatrice Bradley looks into a case involving crimes against a disliked local sheikh. Though there is much charm in the prose and dialogue, the story turns dull around the midway point. Mitchell has been

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published so sporadically in the United States that it's a shame her publishers don't go after the best (not necessarily the latest) of her work. Two recent Mitchells that would have been better choices for import are *Fault in the Structure* (published in Britain in 1977) and *Mingled with Venom* (1978).

Ron Goulart has edited *The Great British Detective* (Mentor/New American Library, $3.95), fifteen stories divided about equally between the familiar and the relatively seldom seen, concerning such sleuths as Sherlock Holmes, Lord Peter Wimsey, Father Brown, Hercule Poirot (Belgian but with a British author), and Dr. Gideon Fell (British but with an American author). The longest and most unexpected tale is William Murray Grayham's "The Rajah's Bodyguard," a 1906 novelette about Sexton Blake. Though implausible and racist, the shipboard tale does move along at a fine clip, and the account of the working routine of a liner's crew is a bonus. There's plenty of action (including slapstick) but not much detection — Blake seems just to *know* things. In all, this is a solid anthology with informative editorial notes by Goulart.

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a *NEW* Inspector Saito story by

JANWILLEM van de WETERING

Do the above lines come as a surprise? They will to many of you. Heretofore, stories about the winning Inspector Saito have been published under Janwillem van de Wetering's pseudonym, Seiko Legru. Now that G. P. Putnam's Sons is bringing out a collection of Saito stories under the author's own name we are delighted to publish this new Saito story under his own name as well.

So join us in his small room at the Tokyo police station near the Imperial Palace as the young tea-drinking Inspector learns of a possible murder and proceeds to solve it by his usual methods—persistent questions and a lesson he has learned from Parallel Cases Under the Peartree, *a classic Chinese text on detection and jurisprudence—144 cases solved and judged by famous magistrates of Ancient China . . .*

INSPECTOR SAITO AND THE TWENTY-SEN STAMP

by JANWILLEM van de WETERING

If, Saito thought, I really am as intelligent as the police academy teachers unanimously stated at graduation, what am I doing in this impossible little room? There's snow on the ground and the park of the former Imperial Palace is close by. I could be walking between graceful pine trees and ancient lovely buildings. No civilian will be committing a serious crime at this time of the morning. I'll wait for the water to boil, have tea, and be on my way.

He pulled the mini-hibachi, in which charcoal had once glowed but which now housed an electric element, carefully toward him,

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spooned green tea powder into a cracked cup, poured boiling water from the kettle atop the hibachi, and made the tea foam by stirring it energetically with an old chopstick.

Someone knocked at the door. "Yes?"

Kobori marched in, stopped, and bowed. "Morning, Inspector-san."

Saito sighed and pushed the cup to the edge of his desk. "Morning, Sergeant. Here you are. I thought you had night duty."

Kobori lowered himself carefully on a chair after placing his cap, visor forward, under its tatty straw seat. He picked up the cup with both hands and watched the Inspector over its edge. "Yes, Saito-san, I should be home by now but I thought I'd better report in first."

Saito's mood improved. Kobori's antique good manners were comical and heartwarming. He opened a drawer of his desk, found a second cup, and once again busied himself with the tea ceremony. Kobori's uniform, in spite of a long night's work, looked as if it had just been torn out of a dry cleaner's plastic cover. He waited until Saito had taken his first sip.

"Inspector-san, there was a fire in the Kitayama Quarter. An old man, a Mr. Nogi, suffocated. I have submitted my report and thought that the matter had been taken care of, but a certain aspect still bothers me."

Saito nodded. "Let's have it."

Kobori cleared his throat. "It was like this. The fire wasn't exactly spectacular and the firemen took care of it in no time, but Mr. Nogi died all the same. He was home by himself. His housekeeper, Setsuko, was out for a walk. Nogi was admiring his stamp collection in the upstairs room and was probably drunk—we found an empty saki bottle under his table. The wastepaper basket behind him caught fire and the flames ignited the floormats. It may be that Nogi-san nodded off after he emptied his ashtray into the basket.

"He was rather a wasted little man, Saito-san—according to the housekeeper he suffered from stomach trouble. He was a retired petty official of the city's administration, seventy years old, and a lifelong bachelor."

"Who alerted the fire department?"

"A neighbor across the road, Mrs. Ichiyo, who wanted to admire the moonlight on the snow and saw flames licking at Mr. Nogi's upstairs window instead."

"And the housekeeper was out for a walk. What time did she come back?"

"At midnight. She had been out for an hour, to the gardens of the

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Daitokuji Temple, which is quite close. She said she couldn't sleep—and it was indeed a beautiful night."

"Out by herself?"

"Yes, Saito-san."

"An attractive woman?"

Kobori nodded. "Thirty years old. A provincial lady, from Hokkaido. They talk kind of strangely out there—I had some trouble catching what she said."

"Do you think Mr. Nogi was a wealthy man?"

"No. But not poor either. The house looked neat."

"Could his stamp album be worth money?"

"Perhaps. It was completely filled."

Saito lit a cigarette. "But it was still there. And the fire was caused by carelessness. But I take it you aren't sitting here to keep me company. What haven't you told me, Sergeant?"

Kobori's sharply featured face inched forward and his deep-set eyes peered worriedly into Saito's. "That housekeeper was frightened and she didn't strike me as a nervous type. It can't have been my fault for I hadn't been harassing her and the constable with me is a most peaceful man. The doctor immediately confirmed that Nogi had indeed been suffocated by smoke and had left with the corpse before she returned. I merely asked her the normal questions—whether the dead man had any relatives and if she intended to leave the house unattended—but she trembled and stuttered and it seemed that she could become aggressive any moment, like an animal that feels itself trapped. Interrogating her, I thought she might perhaps be in shock because her life had so suddenly changed—no more work, she was fond of the old man—but later, after leaving my report at the desk, I began to wonder about the whole thing."

"Do you know if there are any heirs?"

"A nephew who lives in Osaka." Kobori pulled a notebook from his side pocket and noted an address in tight square characters. He tore the page free and put it on Saito's desk. "Perhaps you could visit the woman today, if you have a minute, Inspector-san."

Chief Inspector Ikemiya waited at the open elevator door but Saito didn't move. Ikemiya gestured invitingly. "Aren't you getting out?"

"I forgot something," Saito mumbled and moved over to make space for his superior's ample body. The Chief Inspector looked at his assistant. "At it this early already? They told me at the desk that nothing happened last night."

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"There was a fire," Saito said tonelessly.

The elevator stopped. "A fire?" said Ikemiya in the corridor. "Since when do we waste our time with fires?"

"A fire and a corpse."

"A burned corpse?"

"A choked corpse."

Ikemiya shook his head irritably. He grabbed Saito's arm. "You wouldn't have information that passed me by would you?"

"I don't know yet," Saito said. "Excuse me, this is my office. You'll hear from me, Ikemiya-san, if there is anything further to report."

Saito waited until Ikemiya's door banged shut at the end of the corridor before he picked up a book that had been wrapped in a piece of gold-embroidered silk and took it out of its cover. "Case 16B, now how did that go?" He found the chapter and read.

"When Yen Tsun was prefect of Yang-chou he once made an inspection journey through the district that had been entrusted to him. He suddenly heard someone shout out in fear rather than sadness. He had his chariot stopped and interrogated the person. She answered: 'My husband had an accident with fire and died.' Yen Tsun suspected her and ordered a constable to investigate the corpse. He saw that flies had gathered around the head and, looking closer, discovered the head of an iron nail had been hammered into the skull. It was proved that the woman, together with her paramour, had killed her husband and the suspects confessed."

Ikemiya entered without knocking and stood next to Saito. His fleshy hand hit the desk's edge. "No, Saito, not again! How often do I have to tell you that what happened in antique China has nothing to do with modern Japan?" He stared accusingly at his subordinate. "Times have changed, Inspector! We use computers today and know what happens on planets that the naked eye can hardly see. How can we learn anything from mouldy magistrates who had nothing to apply but their intuition and who utilized a whip to obtain confessions?"

Saito observed his chief quietly. Ikemiya produced a handkerchief and blew his nose. "This damned snow has given me a cold. Never mind, tell me what's wrong with your corpse. Do we have a case? And if so, do you plan working on it?"

Saito folded the book back into its silken wrap. "Sergeant Kobori thinks that the dead man's housekeeper behaved in an unusual manner and I was thinking I might go and see her."

"Tell me what you know."

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Saito did.

Ikemiya extended a hand. "I've stopped smoking but this nonsense is too much. Give me a cigarette, Inspector." Saito did. Ikemiya inhaled deeply and blew out the smoke, coughing sharply. "Bah, a rich aristocrat like yourself who considers his work a hobby should allow himself a better brand. And what sort of a motive for this possible murder would you suggest?"

"I don't know yet."

Ikemiya regarded his glowing cigarette. "Nothing seems to be missing, you said. An emotional conflict? Nogi was a sickly old chap and Setsuko an attractive young woman. It has been ascertained that old lechers tend to abuse their servants, but a wench from Hokkaido isn't likely to be a pushover. Perhaps you should have a look at her. Spending an hour with her might be more enlightening than reading dusty books here."

He rubbed his stub in the ashtray. "But don't get carried away by youthful enthusiasm. We're here to keep things quiet, not to add to the confusion."

Saito let the car go and compared the address with Kobori's note. Except for a few sparrows arguing in the gutter nothing moved in the tiny street. The house seemed hardly damaged—only the paper in the upstairs window had been torn. Saito pushed the gate open and walked to the door that slid aside as soon as he had called good morning.

"Setsuko-san?" he said.

Her gaze was steady. "At your service."

Her simple kimono and starched apron did give her a rather provincial appearance. "I'm a police officer," Saito told her. "It's customary to check when there has been a deadly accident. Can I come in please?"

She guided him into the front room, arranged a cushion for him to sit on, and knelt opposite him on the worn mat. Her hands pulled at the hem of her apron. Saito smiled encouragingly. "I hear you have been working for Mr. Nogi for more than a year—is that right, Setsuko-san?"

"Yes."

"And you were a waitress in a restaurant before. Did Mr. Nogi meet you there?"

Her facial muscles hardened and she had trouble formulating her

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answer. "That's what I said." Her hand brushed impatiently across her face.

"How do you mean 'that's what I said'? Wasn't it true?"

Tears dribbled slowly toward her high cheekbones and her shoulders shook. "No."

"You didn't work in a restaurant?"

She swallowed and shot him a desperate look. "I shouldn't have said that. I knew you would find out the truth."

"What truth?"

"That I used to be a photo model."

"A photo model," Saito said pensively. "And Mr. Nogi? How did you get to know your employer?"

"In the studio—behind the Raku Hotel."

Saito recalled the low-class hotel and the neighborhood behind it. Porno studios, rickety little wooden buildings where women allowed themselves to be photographed in any way the client specified for a small fee. "And you were ashamed to divulge that information to the policemen who came here last night?"

"Yes."

"I see. Mr. Nogi visited you often in the studio and offered you a job in the end. Is that correct?"

"Yes."

"So you weren't just a housekeeper?"

She pointed at the low ceiling. "We slept together, upstairs."

"You were paid?"

She nodded. "But I never managed to save. He only ate boiled rice and wouldn't let me cook for myself because the smell made him hungry. To eat outside all the time costs a lot of money."

Saito produced a pack of cigarettes and offered them.

"No," she said. "It's unhealthy. Mr. Nogi smoked and the doctor said he shouldn't."

"Do you mind if I do?"

She got up and took a dish from a shelf. "Here," she said, "for your ashes."

"He drank too, didn't he?" Saito asked.

"No."

"No?"

She shut her eyes and nodded. "Yes, sometimes he did."

Saito sucked his cigarette thoughtfully. "Tell me—how did Nogi-san spend his time?"

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Her apron strap had become undone and her hands trembled as she redid the knot. "He walked about the quarter and during the evenings he usually played with his stamps or we watched television."

Saito got to his feet. "May I see the upstairs room, Setsuko-san please?"

She led the way on the narrow staircase and he admired the seductive shape of her firm body, accentuated by the tight kimono. ("It was proved that the woman, together with her paramour, had killed her husband and the suspects confessed.")

She bowed awkwardly. "This is the room where Nogi-san died."

"Another question. You did lie to us before so please don't hold it against me if I am a little suspicious. Tell me, were you and Mr. Nogi married perhaps?"

She grinned nervously. "No, he didn't want to. I said we should get married so he wouldn't have to waste money on wages any more but he didn't want me to inherit the house. His nephew in Osaka has sons who are supposed to go to university later on. He said I should be able to take care of myself."

"That wasn't very nice of him, was it?"

"No."

"And what are your plans now, Setsuko-san?"

She bit her finger before she answered. "I don't know yet."

"You have no relatives?"

"No, nobody."

"No brothers, no sisters?"

"No one." She suddenly looked angry and he dropped his gaze. The room showed clear signs of the fire. A floor mat had changed into a mass of ashes and the table and rolled-up bedding in a corner were covered with yellowish flaky substance, remnants of the fire brigade's foam. He touched a saki bottle with the tip of his shoe. "Mr. Nogi shouldn't have imbibed strong rice wine. Saki is pure poison for people who have stomach trouble."

She didn't comment. She had pressed herself against the wall. Her breathing was laborious and her fingers scratched on the material of her apron.

He bowed toward the table. "Here is the stamp album. Maybe I should take it with me." He shook a visiting card from his wallet, put it on the table, and picked up the album. "If Mr. Nogi's nephew should come you can tell him he can retrieve it at headquarters."

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The woman still seemed stuck to the wall. Saito nodded pleasantly. "I'd better be on my way again. Goodbye, Setsuko-san. . ."

Chief Inspector Ikemiya frowned furiously. He had adjusted his revolving chair to its sharpest angle and kicked off his shoes. His feet rested on a stack of law books. Saito studied the energetic toes of his chief moving about gaily within the thin cotton of the fairly worn socks.

"You don't exactly obey your instructions," grumbled Ikemiya. "I thought I had asked you not to bother that woman unnecessarily. Why did she have to be arrested? The constables told me she didn't come easily. One of them had to go to emergency to have his face treated. Couldn't you have taken her in yourself?"

"That wouldn't have been a good move."

"No?" Ikemiya's heavy eyebrows wriggled sarcastically. "You weren't frightened of her, were you? I thought you were such a hero on the judo mat?"

Saito smiled politely. "I wasn't in uniform and I had made the mistake of sending the car away. If a man drags a handsome woman along the street passersby tend to interfere."

Ikemiya's big toe peeped through a fresh hole in his sock. Saito grinned. Ikemiya yanked his feet back.

"Saito," Ikemiya said, "this time you have gone too far. That woman is innocent. Haven't you see the pathologist's report? Alcohol in the blood and smoke in the lungs. That old codger was as drunk as a coot—whether you think the woman lied or not, he did choke on smoke. That balderdash you're trying to make me swallow, that case 16B taken out of context from a primeval manual on catching idiots is drivel. The 16B corpse had a nail in his noggin. Your corpse had breathed smoke. That scientifically proven fact tells us he wasn't killed before the fire occurred." Ikemiya's hairy fist hit the desktop. "There was *no* indication that violence was applied and confirmation that the housekeeper spoke the truth. So what do we do? We throw the lady in a cell." He held up a piece of paper. "Do you know what this is?"

"A letter?" Saito asked softly.

"Right—signed by Chief of Police Kato. The boss wants to know whether I truly think we have sufficient evidence to warrant the suspect's arrest. What do you suggest I should answer?"

"That we do have sufficient reason for suspicion," Saito said evenly. "I visited the lady across the street from the Nogi residence.

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Her name is Ichiyo. She stated that she knew Nogi well and often talked to him. She swore that Nogi hadn't enjoyed a drop of alcohol since he was operated on a year ago for bleeding in the stomach."

"Bah, that's what he told *her*. Alcoholics are professional liars."

"Mrs. Ichiyo also told me about the housekeeper's brother."

Ikemiya groaned and stuck out his hand. Saito filled it with a cigarette. Ikemiya pressed his silver desk-lighter. "Brother?" He inhaled deeply.

"Yes, Chief Inspector-san. Setsuko was alone in the world except for a brother who visited her regularly. Mr. Nogi was quite fond of the young man and told Mrs. Ichiyo he was intelligent and eager to learn."

"And *you* believe—"

"That the so-called brother was Setsuko's lover."

"And so, according to Case 16B, the loving couple did away with poor helpless Mr. Nogi." Ikemiya's fist banged on the armrest of his chair. "And *why*, if I may ask, Mr. Genius? To steal the gold bars carefully hidden by Nogi? Since when do retired minor officials dispose of secret wealth? Nothing was missing, was it? Even the stamp album had not been disturbed. You really want us to be shown up as nitwits? If the law is applied literally we can be accused of illegal harassing of a citizen."

Saito shook his head. "I don't think so, Ikemiya-san. The suspect has weakened her position considerably by telling lies."

The thin scarecrow surrounded by carelessly stacked boxes and stockbooks bowed to Saito. Saito greeted him, placed the album on the littered counter, and presented his card.

The storekeeper's mouth dropped open. "You are an inspector of the Criminal Investigation Department?"

Saito nodded. "We would value your advice. This collection interests us. It's an item involved in a serious case. Perhaps you could spare a few minutes to study its contents."

The dealer's thin lips curved into a sardonic grin. "You wouldn't be after a free appraisal, would you now, Mr. Official?"

"No," Saito said quietly. "Quite honestly, I don't know what I'm after, but you're an expert. All I can see is that the collection is complete. I'm hoping that what you say might give me some clues."

The storekeeper switched on a strong light and opened the album. "I don't see a complete album very often. Either the owner is old or he is rich. The old stamps aren't printed any more and the modern

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stuff gets out of the machines by the millions and can be bought anywhere at any price. Here, the Nineteenth Century—that's what matters, you know."

Saito followed the spindly finger that caressed the page. "Ah," the dealer whispered almost reverently. "The 1874 series, with the imperial chrysanthemum as the chief decoration. The stamps of four, six, twenty, and thirty sen. The sen was worth something then and a hundred fitted into a yen. Now even a yen won't buy you a sliver of dried fish. May I take them out, Inspector-san?"

"Please."

The storekeeper opened a drawer and produced a pair of tweezers and a magnifier equipped with a focused light. He switched the gadget on and pulled the twenty-sen stamp, an unsightly lilac-colored bit of irregularly notched paper, carefully from the album. "They come on thick paper and we're likely to pay a bit. And they come on thin paper, in which case we empty out the purse. On thin paper this darling is worth three and a half million, dear sir. And the collectors will pay that much too, for the series is harder to get all the time. Ah, just look at this!"

"It is a little torn." Saito was peering at what the dealer dangled in front of his eyes.

"You can see that without spectacles? You are a happy man." The dealer rummaged in his drawer again and came up with cut lenses attached to a small clasp. He clipped them onto his glasses. "Right—let's take another peek."

The sudden flow of abuse was pronounced with such venom that Saito staggered away from the counter.

"Rubbish! Utter rubbish!" the dealer yelled. "Torn and glued! Worthless junk! That's the way the fool who's after completeness crooks himself! What does he care as long as his album is full? The twenty-sen on thin paper, the rarity we all look for, it finally pops up and you're ready to thank the Goddess of Mercy, and it's damaged—you've still got nothing."

"Why don't you look further?" Saito asked. "So this one is bad—but there may be others."

"A pile of waste," the storekeeper said sadly. "Fool's gold." His eyes darted. "—Hey, what do we have here?" He pressed his magnifier on the other three stamps of the series and pulled on the goatee that pretended to hide his lack of chin. "Well, now, these seem to be in excellent order—they're on thick paper, of course, but even so they should be worth a couple of thousand." He moved the

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magnifier and scrutinized the rest of the page. "Here, very nice too, three thousand maybe. And here again, prime quality I would say." He turned the page and continued to nod approvingly. "First class. Not a bad collection after all." He took off his glasses and smiled at Saito. "Would you like a cup of tea, Inspector-san? This work always makes me thirsty. I go through half a gallon a day and my throat stays dry."

"You don't want to study the others?"

"Do you want me to? The new stuff is boring, I think. It's only the old ones that cheer me up. Here, I'll put those four back again before they get lost."

The dealer hooked his spectacles over his ears again and flipped back to the page where he had started. "Strange, don't you think?" he said. "Why would that one stamp, the only one that really matters, be in such a miserable condition? If it had been all right it would have been worth a hundred times more than all the rest of the collection together." He hesitated in the process of returning the first stamp to the album. "Huh."

"What is it?" Saito asked. "Do you see something?"

"The man wants to know if I see something." The dealer's complicated glasses nearly touched the page. "There must have been a protector here and it was ripped out with force. The marks are clear enough." The tip of his index finger rubbed the damaged paper. "You know what that is—a protector?"

"No."

"I'll explain it to you. See here—they come in strips of double clear plastic so the stamps can be inserted between the two layers. Once the stamp is in, you cut the strip with a pair of scissors so that you get a nice protector that fits the stamp exactly. There's glue on the back. You lick it and you press stamp and protector into the album." He pushed himself away from the counter and stretched. "But those strips are fairly pricy and the customer usually prefers cheap stickers that he can buy for next to nothing per thousand. Protectors are used only for special stamps, or for new ones when the gummed sides should remain undamaged."

Saito closed the album, stuck it under his arm, and bowed.

"No tea?" the dealer asked. "My tea is famous in the street. A cup will do you good, especially when you have to face the cold again."

Saito had reached the door. "Thank you," he said, bowing once again. "Some other time perhaps. I appreciate your help."

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Saito stopped outside to enjoy the fresh air before walking on, past show windows that held stamps and their appurtenances. A sign dangling from iron hooks reminded him it was lunchtime.

The small restaurant's interior was crowded but he managed to find an empty stool and ordered a dish of fried rice garnished with pickled radish.

He observed the customers while he ate. Most were elderly gentlemen drinking tea and nibbling seaweed cookies while they discussed the contents of each others' stockbooks. Stamps held by tweezers flitted across the tabletops. The café seemed to house an eternal exchange. A poster attached to the counter propagated a stamp magazine and informed the public that single copies were available. Saito asked the waitress to bring him the magazine and he glanced through the pages while he slurped his tea. Except for some articles, illustrated with color photographs of stamps, the magazine contained a number of advertisements offering the services of mail-order companies and specialty stores. He saw that the Kyoto-based dealers preferred a certain street, the street he happened to be on now. He sighed and redlined the ads, a total of eight—hopefully he had enough time. He paid, grasped the album under his arm, and left the restaurant.

Fortune smiled at the fifth store. The owner, a small fat fellow with a kindly face, bowed helpfully. "Yes, Inspector, I do remember a repaired lilac twenty-sen stamp of 1874. I found it in a box with leftovers I picked up cheaply at an auction and I jumped for joy."

Saito grinned. "Before you saw that the stamp was worthless."

The owner whacked himself on the forehead. "Indeed. What a disappointment! The chance you've been praying for and heaven frowns on you after all."

"What did you do with the stamp?"

"I kept it as a curiosity for a while but then I gave it away to a student who had been helping out here for a few weeks. He was a bit of a collector himself and he craved the stamp because it would give some color to an otherwise empty page."

"Do you remember his name?"

The owner's skull had to be thick for the resounding slap he cheerfully gave himself hardly made him blink. "You're a policeman, I clean forgot. That nice young man wouldn't be in trouble, I hope?"

Saito's smile faded away. "He could very well be. Is he a friend of yours?"

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"Not a friend," the owner said, "but he was a hard worker and I liked him. His name was Wakana. He told me he was a student of mathematics. . ."

Ikemiya pointed disdainfully at the stamp Saito had placed on his desk.

"That miserable little rag? Three and a half million yen?"

"Yes, sir—the price of a good-sized house in a nice area or a sum that properly invested will keep a modest man going just on the interest. You must admit that a valuable object like this could consitute a motive for murder."

Ikemiya indicated the chair that he reserved for important visitors. "Sit down, Inspector, and tell me exactly how you concluded your case. I take it that the report and signed confessions will reach me in due course, but we might go through the case verbally now. Fire away, Saito-san."

Saito relaxed in the leather-upholstered seat. "First of all, I should state that I would never have considered the case if Kobori hadn't insisted I should. My visit to Mr. Nogi's house only confirmed Kobori's original suspicion. Setsuko's blatant lie about Nogi-san's drinking habits was the next indication and I began to suspect that the murderers—"

Ikemiya's protesting hand slapped down on the desk blotter. "One moment, Saito. I don't follow how you could, at that early stage of the game, surmise that Setsuko hadn't acted alone."

Saito smiled. "*Parallel Cases under the Peartree,* the Thirteenth Century manual I habitually use when I busy myself with detection. I'll fetch it if you like and read you the relevant passage."

Ikemiya waved the suggestion away. "Save yourself the effort."

"Even in the old days," Saito said solemnly, "magistrates knew that certain kinds of weak, dependent women, and Setsuko is a classic example of the type, do not easily commit serious crimes by themselves. If they do misbehave, a male master has set them off, using them as an accomplice. When I interrogated Setsuko I could see she had little intelligence and that she would have played a lesser part in the drama. She would have met a great many men when she worked as a porno-model and not all elderly gentlemen like Mr. Nogi. I assumed that she had found a lover and the affair had continued after she moved in with Nogi."

"A supposition," Ikemiya said bad-temperedly, "without any factual evidence."

Saito nodded. "Certainly, but a useful hypothesis for the time

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being. All I had to do was look for facts and try to fit them in with my theory. If they wouldn't fit, the hypothesis would have to be replaced by another."

"Yes, save me the lecture. What happened then?"

"I heard that a young man had been visiting the Nogi residence and that the master of the house had called him both intelligent and eager to learn. I asked myself what Nogi, a retired clerk, could possibly have had to teach him. The old man's only hobby was stamp collecting. It seemed clear that he had showed off his album and this Wakana had shown considerable interest."

Ikemiya's fingers drummed on the blotter. "Right—very possible."

"So the lover and his beloved killed old Mr. Nogi to benefit from the situation. But what did Mr. Nogi own? A house and furniture—objects that are hard or impossible to steal. A stamp album which had not been taken. I took the collection to an expert who told me the only really valuable stamp, an 1874 twenty-sen lilac chrysanthemum, was damaged and therefore worthless while all other stamps were in excellent condition."

"So you had to find the original. And you did for it is here on my desk. How did you find it?"

"I called on the local stamp stores and a dealer told me he had once given a torn 1874 twenty-sen stamp to a student of mathematics who had worked in his store. He gave me his name and I telephoned the university and obtained his address. I then collected Sergeant Kobori and we went to Wakana's rooming house."

"Was he there?"

"Yes," said Saito. "He refused to let us in his room at first, saying we should have a warrant, but I threatened to arrest him."

"So you knew the stamp would be in his room."

"Clearly—why refuse to let us in otherwise? The trouble was exactly where in his room? Stamps are easily hidden. Fortunately, Kobori is an experienced policeman and he observed Wakana while I asked him some innocent questions. He noticed that Wakana's eyes kept shifting to a photograph of Setsuko. The photograph probably dated back to the time she worked at the studio because her pose was rather revealing. There were other pictures in the room and Wakana must have seen this photograph a thousand times but its presence seemed to disturb him somehow."

"The stamp had been stuck to the photo's back?"

"We found it in the frame, between the actual photo and a piece of cardboard backing."

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Ikemiya grinned contentedly. "Did he confess straight off?"

"He refused to say anything for a while but broke down when here in this building I had him look through a cell-door peephole. His spirit broke when he saw Setsuko."

"Did you tell him she had confessed?"

Saito sat up. "I certainly did not—such methods are beneath my sense of dignity."

"But you didn't tell him she had *not* confessed, right?"

"I didn't tell him anything at all. I only wanted him to realize we had arrested his accomplice as well."

"Not to tell the truth is to lie, Saito, but never mind that subtle point for now. We all know that suspects can easily be manipulated when kept in uncertainty. Now tell me how the actual murder was committed."

"Wakana and Setsuko grabbed hold of Mr. Nogi and forced him to drink half a bottle of strong saki."

"So he really had stopped drinking?"

"Yes, and after a year of abstention and with an ulcerous stomach such a dose can be deadly."

"But why didn't they steal the album outright? It was their intention that the house would burn—they couldn't know a neighbor would pick that evening to admire the moonlight."

Saito nodded. "That point bothered me too. But Wakana is a vain young man and he took pleasure in supplying me with an answer. His landlady once asked him to burn some trash in the yard. The trash contained an old telephone book. He learned that a fat book does not disappear in a fire but changes into a lump of brittle ashes that keep the original shape of the volume. Wakana was worried that Mr. Nogi's nephew, the heir, would try to find the album's remnants to claim the value with the insurance company."

Ikemiya sighed and picked up the stamp. "Quite. And how did the suspect intend to change this into money?"

"He was going to wait until the next large stamp auction in Tokyo. Those auctions not only attract dealers but also wealthy collectors. He would have been sure to obtain the full price."

Ikemiya got slowly to his feet. "I believe I have to congratulate you after all, Saito, even if you were incredibly lucky and your hypothesis had little to support it."

Saito stood, bowed, and started for the door. "Wait," the Chief Inspector said, holding out the stamp. "Take this with you before I sneeze and it's lost forever."

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"If the noticingness of all the little old ladies of the land could be harnessed," the Inspector said, "we'd have a sight fewer unsolved crimes on our books . . ."

LITTLE OLD LADY PASSING BY

by JEAN BOWDEN

Milly Morris hurried along the shopping parade so as to get her neighbor's prescription filled the moment the chemist opened at eight-thirty. A familiar figure in her dark print dress and small-brimmed straw hat, she was greeted by shopkeepers getting ready for the day's trade. The July sun, only four hours old, was already serving notice that by noon it would be too strong for her comfort.

She called good morning to Sam Barlow as he loaded pint bottles of milk into his handling crate. "Morning, Mrs. Morris," he replied. "Treating yourself today, were you?" It was a reference to a note she'd put out asking him to leave a carton of cream. She didn't stop to tell him it was to make a bavaroise for little Sally Adams' birthday, but merely nodded and trotted on.

At the fruit shop yesterday's few unsold boxes of raspberries lay in an untidy heap. On her way home she might buy them at a bargain price to make a few pots of jam for the church Bring-and-Buy Sale on Saturday.

She reached the break in the row of shops caused by a little side-alley. An automatic glance showed her Timothy Franton's green VW Beetle. Good, she thought, Enid's son's been to visit. She knew how much Enid treasured his occasional overnight stays, less frequent naturally now that he was married and settled on the other side of London.

Timothy's parents had been good friends of the Morrises. Bob Morris had bought many a book at the Frantons' bookshop. Now both Milly and Enid were widowed, Milly alone in her little house in Claremount Terrace and Enid alone in her flat over the shop. The

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bookstore was let out as lock-up premises to an intellectual young man in owlish glasses who put James Joyce in the window. James Joyce! Who in Claremount was going to pay money for James Joyce?

Yet Milly peered into the bookshop as she passed, ready to smile at Dennis Goulding if he was there. She recollected almost at once that he seldom showed up before nine-thirty. There was no milk on his doorstep, though, so he must have arrived early today. Or perhaps he had stopped milk deliveries in this hot weather when it went sour so quickly.

The chemist was apologetic that his dispenser was not yet on duty. "Will you call back later, Mrs. Morris?" he said.

"Oh, I'd rather not, Mr. Patel. It's going to be hot later."

"Then sit down and wait, dear lady. Be comfortable."

Comfortable she was not, on the very hard chair, but the dispenser arrived a little after nine and quickly put himself to work preparing the medicine. Stiff from sitting, Milly decided to loosen up by walking around the block before going home.

She was almost halfway along the road running parallel to Claremount High Street, almost abreast of the alley, when she recalled the raspberries. Turning into the alley, she saw that Tim's car was gone. Enid said he usually left about eight-thirty when he stayed overnight.

Habitual heedfulness made her glance up as she approached the point where she could see the roof-garden of Enid's flat. This was really the roof of the bookshop, which extended out to the back, and Enid always had tubs of geranium and lobelia there in summer to make a pleasant setting for sunbathing. Her washline soared above her garden, suspended on two tall posts. Milly saw a line of clothes glinting white and tan and yellow and dark-blue and plaid.

Good for Enid, she thought, she'd done her wash the minute Tim left. It would dry in no time. It was her friend's proud boast that she didn't spoil her garden a minute longer than necessary with laundry but had it dried, ironed, and in the airing cupboard by teatime on a fine day.

Milly bought her raspberries at half price, delivered his medicine to Ned Shields, had cheese and an apple for lunch, took a nap, and when it was cooler in the evening made the bavaroise and the jam. Next morning she was pleased to see both had set firm. She labeled the jars, delivered the dessert to the grateful Mrs. Adams, then set off to change arthritic Alice Rayner's library books for her.

On the way home it was convenient to take a short cut down what

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she mentally designated "the bookshop alley"—and she was surprised to see another line of washing out on Enid's roof garden. She was moving on when a thought struck her. She back-tracked. It was the same line of washing as yesterday—white towel and sheets, Enid's yellow sundress. . .

Now that's odd, Milly said to herself, it's not like Enid to leave her washing out overnight. But then, hot weather makes us lazy. She herself had had a nap yesterday afternoon.

But the image of that line of laundry was a nagging uneasiness. She babysat for the Parkers that evening, but as soon as they came home she said a hasty goodnight, buttoned up her cardigan, and hurried to the High Street. The night sky was the pale bronze-grey of summer over a city, and with the light of the street lamps she was able to see the string of wash, still there, unmoving in the calm air.

Going to the downstairs door in the alley, she rang the bell. No response. She stooped to peer through the mail flap. The hall and the steep staircase were invisible in the darkness. She had a momentary vision of Enid crumpled at the foot of the stairs. "Enid!" she called. *"Enid!"* No reply.

After a moment she straightened. Perhaps she was in bed asleep. Or too unwell to come to the door. Or had she gone with Timothy when he left? But no, the line of washing had appeared after Tim would have left for the office.

Back home, Milly dialed Enid's number. The ringing went on and on, unanswered. She dialed the local police station and introduced herself. "This is Mrs. Morris of Fourteen Claremount Terrace. I'm a bit worried about a friend of mine, Enid Franton, of Sixty-one A Claremount High Street—"

"The bookstore, you mean?"

"Enid lives in the flat over the shop. But she doesn't answer her door or her phone."

"Gone out, perhaps."

"She's left a line of washing out on her terrace."

"Oh?" A moment's thought. "I expect she'll take it in before she goes to bed."

"She left it out all last night," Milly said. "It's been there since yesterday morning, and she never leaves things out on the line longer than they take to dry."

The station sergeant sighed. These twittery old dears. "I could send a man around, I suppose."

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"I've got a key," said Milly. "Enid gave it to me when she had flu last year, then said would I keep it, just in case. But I'd rather not go in on my own."

"No," said the sergeant, warming to her. "Our lad will be there directly. He'll wait for you."

"Lad" was the correct term. Really, policemen were absurdly young these days. After ringing three times, he took the key from her and unlocked the door. When he stepped inside she was at his heels to find the light switch for him, then was grateful to see no unconscious form on the stairs.

The constable went up the steep flight, calling: "Mrs. Franton? Are you there, Mrs. Franton?"

They reached the landing. The living-room door was ajar. The constable pushed it open, went in, glanced around, and came out shaking his head. When he went into the kitchen next to it Milly surveyed the living room for herself.

A muffled exclamation from the kitchen brought her hurrying out. Something in the constable's face as he met her told her it was bad news. She made to go past him, but he blocked her way. "I shouldn't go in there, ma'am."

Her wrinkled face creased in apprehension. "Enid?"

"She's dead."

His face wavered in front of her. She put a hand on his chest to steady herself. "A heart attack—"

"This wasn't natural causes," he said grimly.

"Oh, dear God!" She made for the kitchen door. He leapt to prevent her, but not quickly enough to stop one dreadful glimpse.

The blood-matted red-grey hair, the smashed face, the red clots on the flatiron, the circling flies. . .

She sat quietly until he had summoned a crowd of experts on his walkie-talkie. A senior plainclothesman, Inspector Jeffery, took her into the living room to question her gently. She was ashamed later at how little sense she made. He sent her home in a police car with a policewoman, who offered to stay. When her offer was refused, she suggested summoning Milly's daughter Jennifer from Colchester. "No, thank you, I'm all right," Milly said with stubborn courage. "I'm used to being on my own."

But still sleepless at three-thirty, with the events of the last two days playing ceaselessly on a screen in her mind, she wished she'd rung Jennifer.

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Next morning, feeling more herself, she was debating whether it would be disrespectful to Enid to go to the Bring-and-Buy Sale when her phone rang. It was Inspector Jeffery calling from Enid's flat. "We're trying to ascertain what's been taken—her son says she sold some things from her china collection so he can't be sure."

"That's right." Milly reeled off the items Enid had mentioned to her.

"I wonder if you could come round and help us? I'll send a car for you."

"Of course, Inspector," Milly said. "But there's no need of a car." What would the neighbors say, police cars at all hours of the day and night!

When she reached the home of her dead friend, she found a plain-clothes sergeant in the doorway checking a time-schedule with the newsboy who delivered locally. Dennis Goulding from the bookstore was on the upstairs landing talking in a sympathetic undertone to Inspector Jeffery. Tim Franton, tall and well dressed in the casual style he affected, was moving helplessly about the living room, his eyes red-rimmed.

He turned at Milly's greeting and shook his head at her murmured condolence. "I think there was a china night-light cottage here, wasn't there?" he asked, pointing to a gap in the display cabinet.

"That's upstairs in your old room, isn't it? But her collection of cream jugs is gone—there were six of them, Inspector."

"Valuable?"

"About three hundred pounds, I'd guess." She swallowed painfully. "Not worth taking a life for."

"The thief probably didn't mean to," the detective said. "He walked in, she happened on him, he panicked, and did more than he meant."

Milly remembered the blood-stained iron. "She was probably getting ready to do the ironing. The laundry was out on the line." She shuddered. "Will you get him?"

Jeffery looked dubious. "Might do. The trouble is, too many fellows go in for walk-in thefts, just a few valuables and some money taken." He sighed. "Elderly ladies often invite youngsters in."

"Youngsters?" Tim Franton said. "The paper boy?"

"Oh, no!" protested Milly, thinking of cheerful, whistling Billy Bosell.

"Don't be so quick to say that," reproved the Inspector. "Most murders are done by someone the victim knows."

The bookseller, who had followed the Inspector in, sighed and

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shook his head. "I can't believe it," he said. "To think I was probably nearby while this was happening. I'm sorry, Franton." There was real regret in his voice and his somber expression was emphasized by the tinted glasses he wore. "Is it all right if I go now, Inspector?" he inquired with apology. "I'll do anything to help but I've told you all I know and Saturday's my busy day."

"Quite all right, Mr. Goulding," Jeffery said. "We appreciate your help." Then, after the bookseller had left, he returned to the point he had been making. "The thief probably hoped to get money or jewelry but took the china when he didn't find anything better. He may have been about to search the tea-caddy and the biscuit tin when Mrs. Franton came in—from the roof-garden, as you were saying, Mrs. Morris. Ladies often hide money in the tea-caddy."

Sergeant Tebbitt was sent with Timothy to see if anything was gone from the upstairs room while the Inspector took notes regarding the missing china. Again he asked Milly to explain about the wash-line, to help establish the time of death.

"She'd do it the minute Tim left, I imagine."

"So that would make it eight-thirty or eight-thirty-five. And she hung it out—when?"

"That old machine takes forty-five minutes to complete its cycle. Say about quarter past nine. That fits, because I saw it when I went by about ten."

"The police surgeon estimates time of death at between eight and nine-thirty." When she flinched he said, "I'm sorry, but we have to concentrate on such details. In this hot weather, time of death is difficult to establish."

"The weather's proved important, hasn't it," she agreed. "Because of it, I expected her washing to be taken in a few hours later at most. That's why I became worried when it was still there yesterday." She broke off. "Would it be all right if I went and brought it in, Inspector? Enid would think it so slovenly just to leave it."

He was privately amused. "I don't see why not."

Milly had to stretch to take the old-fashioned wooden pegs off the clothes. She dropped them into the basket, neatly folded. Bed sheets, a towel, Timothy's chinos, two of his blue shirts, Enid's sundress. Oddly, there were gaps between several items, gaps she hadn't noticed the first time she had seen the wash. The morning sun glared into her face, making her squint. By the time she had finished, her eyes were watering.

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The Inspector cocked his head to sounds overhead. "We'll be going in a minute," he said.

She nodded, then frowned. "The clothespins were all wrong," she muttered, staring at the clothes basket.

"I beg your pardon?"

"The clothespins."

"What about them?"

"They were on the wrong side."

"Of what?"

"Of the line."

Inspector Jeffery decided to be tolerant. "Mrs. Morris, you've had a shock—"

"If you mean I'm dotty, you're wrong, Inspector." Milly glared at him like a little terrier. "Are you married?"

"Well, yes."

"Do you live in a house?"

"No, we have a flat, as a matter of fact."

"What happens to the laundry?"

"My wife puts it in the washing machine."

"And dries it with a tumble dryer?" When he nodded she surged on, "So you know nothing about pinning clothes on a line. Well, let me tell you, Inspector Jeffery, it wasn't Enid Franton who hung those clothes out on Thursday."

"What?" Now he was paying attention.

"Come with me." She picked up the clothes basket and marched out to the roof-garden. Bemused, he followed.

She took the first item, which happened to be the towel. She hung it by folding about three inches over the line and pegging it. She took up the next item, a shirt, and did the same by attaching a peg over the shirt and the towel. She looked at the Inspector. "Now you do it, Inspector."

Feeling a fool, yet impelled to obey, he picked up the pair of chinos and pegged them over the shirt edge. He did likewise with the sundress and, frowning and his eyes beginning to water, the sheets.

"Is the sun getting in your eyes?" Milly inquired.

"Yes, it is. It's because of having to look almost straight into it as you work."

"Exactly!" She picked up the clothes basket and went indoors, he following. In the kitchen she said, "The morning sun shines from the east, right? If you peg the clothes from the side of the line facing into it, it shines straight into your eyes. Enid Franton was no idiot.

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Why should she work down that line in discomfort when by turning her back she needn't squint while she did it?"

Jeffery stared at her. "So you think someone else put those clothes out."

"I'm sure of it."

"But why?"

She was taken aback. She hadn't got that far. "To—falsify the time of death, perhaps?"

He looked at her, surprised. "Hm," he said.

Timothy and the sergeant came into the kitchen. Jeffery looked his query. Tim said: "The night-light cottage is missing, along with a little Victorian souvenir vase."

"Nothing else?"

"Not that I can see. My clothes have been thrown about—looking for cash in the pockets, I suppose." He looked away. "I keep a few clothes here, so I can put on a clean shirt if I stay overnight. Mother didn't mind laundering them—" He looked disconsolate.

"You and she were close, I imagine."

Tim shrugged. "I was the only child. You know how it is."

Jeffery nodded. "Hard to get free, sometimes, in a case like that."

Mrs. Morris, putting the pegs into the peg-bag, glanced up at the detective's tone. Tim seemed too immersed in misery to notice the turn of phrase. "She loved me to visit," he recalled. "I felt guilty at coming so seldom, but Diane—"

"Diane? That's your wife?"

"Yes. She and Mother—"

"Didn't get on?"

"Oh, nothing serious, Inspector. Different generations, that's all. Diane's been what you might call a free spirit in her time and Mother was rather apt to say what she thought. So I seldom brought Diane here and naturally I didn't visit so often myself because Diane—well, she felt—" He sighed, moving his shoulders as if some kind of burden might have lifted. "I shan't have any more arguments about *that,*" he added.

"Argued about the visits, did you?" Jeffery said with a sympathetic nod. "With your mother?"

Milly Morris tried to catch his eye. She wanted to stop him, to demand what on earth he thought he was doing. Just because she herself had made him wonder about the time of death, that was no reason to lay traps for Enid's son. The detective might say the victim usually knew the murderer, but that gave him no right to suspect

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Tim. Of *course* Tim had had arguments with his fiery, peppery, red-haired mother, but hit her with an iron? The idea was absurd.

"What time did you leave here Thursday morning?"

"I told you," Tim said, "about half past eight, same as usual."

"And your mother was alive and well?"

"Of course. She was pottering about with the laundry."

"You had a disagreement?"

"A disagreement? Of course not."

"You just said, sir, that you and she had arguments. About how rarely you visited these days."

"Yes, but—but it didn't *mean* anything!"

"All the same, you had words on Thursday?"

"Well, yes, if you must know!" Timothy blurted. He sat down suddenly at the kitchen table. "Oh, God," he groaned, "to think I called her a selfish old nuisance!" He dropped his head on his arms to hide his ravaged face.

Mrs. Morris could stand no more. "It seems to me it would make more sense to find out where the china was taken to be sold," she declared.

"If it was stolen in the first place," Jeffery said, watching Timothy.

Timothy looked up, startled. "What did you say? Of course it was stolen! Things are gone. You saw the gaps in the shelves and Mrs. Morris agrees—"

"The china could have been taken to make it look like a robbery."

A silence that seemed to last a century ensued. Then Timothy said: "Are you saying it was *me* who attacked and robbed my mother? Is that what you mean by a disagreement?" He was deathly pale.

"These things happen, Mr. Franton. Family quarrels escalate into—"

"But it's *nonsense!* My mother and I had our differences but what you're suggesting—" He stopped, gathering himself together. "Whoever did it must have been a mess, spattered with blood! Ask at my office! They'll tell you I was perfectly normal when I arrived!"

"We already checked, sir. Just a formality, you understand. They told us you were much as usual although a little delayed by traffic."

"So where are my blood-stained clothes?"

"Easy enough to change. You say yourself you kept spare clothes here. You could have gotten rid of the others along with the china on your way—"

"Inspector!" exclaimed Milly.

"Not now, Mrs. Morris—"

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"The gaps on the line!" She seized his arm to make him listen.

He tried to prize himself free. "Gaps? What gaps? Please, Mrs. Morris, I'm trying—"

"No, wait! Stains, Inspector—blood stains! He put his shirt and trousers through the washing machine! *That's* why the laundry was put out by someone else!"

Timothy Franton staggered to his feet. "Mrs. Morris," he gasped. "I thought you were a friend of mine—"

"Oh, not you, Tim," she said. "The murderer. He laundered the clothes and hung them out to dry. In this weather that would take about half an hour. He put on some of your things while he waited—didn't you say your clothes had been pulled about?"

"Yes, but—"

"When he took his own clothes off the line, he left gaps. *Gaps,* Inspector."

The detective was listening to her now. "You're surmising a lot from space on a washline, Mrs. Morris."

"Listen," she said. "When you've done as many chores as Enid and me, you have a routine. Remember how you pegged out those clothes? One item, and then the next folded over with one peg holding the edge of two garments?"

"Yes?"

"You go on like that. You don't leave gaps. It's inefficient. But when I took in those clothes, there were two gaps. I think the murderer's shirt and trousers had been hanging there."

Jeffery considered it, his eyes still on Timothy Franton.

"No," she said, "the washing machine takes forty-five minutes, and drying the clothes would take about half an hour. That makes an hour and fifteen minutes."

The Inspector pursed his lips. She was quite right. Franton had been only fifteen minutes late—due, as seemed likely, to traffic problems.

"Besides," Milly went on, "dark-blue and plaid."

"Dark-blue and what?"

"I remember seeing the things hanging on Enid's washline. There was something dark-blue, like a pair of jeans, and a plaid thing, like a tartan shirt." She held up a hand. "They weren't among the things I brought in off the line. I think the murderer walked out in those freshly laundered clothes Thursday morning, Inspector."

Timothy Franton had caught up with her reasoning. "And I don't own a tartan shirt, Inspector. Ring my wife and ask her."

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"All in good time, sir," said the Inspector. But Milly could see he'd lost some of his enthusiasm for Timothy as a suspect. He turned to her. "You've an observant eye, Mrs. Morris. Do you recall anyone in the neighborhood who wears jeans and a plaid shirt?"

"You're thinking it was someone she knew?"

"Well, there was no forced entry."

She sighed. "A lot of young men wear things like that. Suits seem to have gone out of fashion. Tight jeans and tank tops and dark glasses—they all look like they're pretending to be pop stars." She broke off. "Dark glasses!"

Jeffery looked at her. This time he didn't react with impatience. He waited for her to explain herself.

"Dark glasses, Inspector. It wouldn't matter if you were facing into the sun when you pinned up the washing if you were wearing those lenses—you know—that darken with sunlight and go pale indoors?"

"Photochromic," supplied Sergeant Tebbitt, who used them when driving.

Milly put her hands to her cheeks. She felt very cold and very old. "Dennis Goulding wears them all the time," she said.

With a sharp nod at his sergeant, Inspector Jeffery turned and hurried out. As he opened the door of the bookshop he was astonished to find that Mrs. Morris had recovered enough to be at his heels. He was about to order her back when Goulding came forward to serve them.

"Oh," he said, "it's you, Inspector."

"Just a few questions, sir. You told me you didn't see Mrs. Morris on Thursday."

"That's right."

"Did you hear her washing machine going?" asked the Inspector, aware that Milly Morris was sauntering toward a room at the back.

"No, I didn't—although it makes enough noise to wake the—" Goulding broke off at the tastelessness of the metaphor. "If she used it, it must have been before I arrived. I don't generally get here much before nine-thirty."

"You arrived at nine-thirty on Thursday?" Jeffery asked. As Goulding started to answer Milly reappeared, satisfied. She had, in fact, seen what she was looking for—a bottle of milk on the draining-board of the makeshift kitchen.

"Still getting your milk delivered daily?" she asked Dennis Goulding.

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"Why, yes. Except Sundays, of course." The bookseller was eyeing her, his lenses almost clear in the shadowy shop.

"The milk bottle had been taken in from your doorstep on Thursday when I went by at half past eight," Milly said. "Sam Barlow was at the far end of the shopping parade, finishing his delivery run. You'd already opened up the shop and taken the milk in with you."

"Are you sure of this, Mrs. Morris?" the Inspector asked with a frown.

"Quite sure, Mr. Jeffery."

"So?" Goulding shrugged. "Maybe I was early that morning. I don't remember."

"You own a tartan shirt," Milly declared. "I've seen you in it."

"Oh, good lord!" he cried. "Haven't you anything better to do with your time, Inspector, than to listen to this silly woman?" He went to the doorway as if to usher them out. As he stood there in the bright sunlight, his glasses began to darken from clear to brown.

"Mr. Goulding," the Inspector said, "did you go up to Mrs. Franton's flat on Thursday?"

"Certainly not! What reason would I have? I did go up there from time to time, but certainly not on Thursday."

"Did you ever quarrel with her?"

"No, never."

"You know," Milly said suddenly, "no matter what the advertisements say, washing powders don't really get blood stains out of clothes—not completely."

Dennis Goulding went tense, looked round wildly, and lurched through the door he had just opened in a dash for escape. Timothy Franton brought him down in a rugby tackle on the pavement.

Later that day, when the statements had been taken officially at the police station, Inspector Jeffery was able to give Milly the full story.

"Seems he ran a little specialized business—making photocopied editions to order of 'The Urban Guerilla's Handbook' and 'Techniques of Terrorism.' Some had come out blurred and so he had come in early on Thursday to burn them in his yard out back. But the thermal current caused by the hot air carried some of the fragments up to Mrs. Franton's roof-garden."

"And Enid complained, because she was doing her laundry—"

"No, Goulding saw what had happened and went up to 'apologize'—and collect the pieces. He couldn't let them lie around. But

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Mrs. Franton had read part of the text, guessed it was a terrorist pamphlet, and flared up at him."

Milly nodded sadly. "That's just what she'd do."

"She said she was calling the police, so he hit her. After that, he says, he had no choice but to destroy this enemy of the revolution."

"Enid?" said Milly.

The Inspector patted her on the shoulder. "We've got him, and we'll get some of his pals too. That shop of his is very interesting. We found Mrs. Franton's china in smithereens in his dustbin, by the way." He broke off. "Is that right what you said about washing powder—that it doesn't really get blood stains out?"

"I've no idea. I just thought it might scare him if he'd done it."

She had the feeling it was a great honor when the Inspector escorted her to the door of the police station. "What are you going to do with the rest of your day?" Jeffery inquired.

"Oh—take some jam to the Bring-and-Buy Sale at St. James's, I suppose."

"Did you make it yourself?" At her smile of acquiescence he said: "I might drop in and buy a pot."

When he had watched her hurry purposefully away, he went back to the C.I.D. room. His sergeant was starting on the paperwork of the Franton murder. "I'll tell you something, Tebbitt," he said. "If the noticingness of all the little old ladies of the land could be harnessed, we'd have a sight fewer unsolved crimes on our books."

DETECTIVERSE

HELP!

by YURI PRIZEL

Dear Ellery Queen, I'm very distressed,
It's a sad and piteous tale—
Unless I get paid for this piece of verse,
I won't have the cash for my bail.

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a *NEW* short story by

CHRISTIANNA BRAND

"I'm only saying what people will say," *Ben told his father. . . "People talking gossip don't worry about the facts," Sally added. . . "Charming that will be for* us," *said Paula, "won't it?"*

A story about cruelty and compassion within a family written with Christianna Brand's unsparing ear for truth. . .

A PIECE OF CAKE

by CHRISTIANNA BRAND

"Father, you're *not!*" said Paula.

"Over my dead body!" said Ben.

"Over our mother's dead body!" said Sally.

He looked wretchedly round the lovely room. "Well—naturally I wanted to talk it over with you first."

"What did you think we'd say? 'Oh, yes, Father, do go ahead, do marry again! After all, Mother's been dead all of six months—' "

"It doesn't feel like six months to me," he said. "More like six years. It's the—nothingness." He looked very grey and weary but he summoned up a faint little smile. "Do you know, it sounds ridiculous, but one of the things I miss most is not having a bit of cake around. She loved cake-making, didn't she? It was one of the things she still enjoyed. Whenever you wanted it, you could always forage about and find yourself a bit of cake."

"For God's sake—cake! Surely you can buy yourself a cake if you want one?"

He looked back in despair at the young relentless faces. "I'm only trying to explain. It's the being alone. Try to understand—it's the little things, yes, like the cake and one's clothes being in such a

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muddle, and that woman standing there and saying 'What'll I do next?' and not being able to think of anything to tell her. But of course it's much worse than that. No one to talk to, no one to discuss things with—"

"Much notice you took of Mother when she *was* here to discuss things with, as you call it."

"Well, perhaps not—not latterly," he said. "They weren't easy, you know—not these last few years. There was much more to it than you think. But we were still together, we still had common interests."

"What interests, for example?" said Ben in his brutal young way.

"Well—I don't know. Things we still shared, the house, stupid things like meals and things, this room—she'd made this room so beautiful, hadn't she?—we both loved it, each in our own fashion."

"And now you want to bring that woman here to invade it, take possession of it. I won't let you, none of us will let you," said Sally, passionately. "All Mother's lovely things—"

"You can have the things, share them out between you; she'd be happy with that. I can find other things."

"Break up the room, have it all different?"

"I can't win, can I?" he said sadly. "Either way."

"You can win by giving up this disgusting idea and just staying like you are. If you're so lonely, why don't you see more of all of *us?* Or we'll come home more—perhaps we've neglected you."

"It isn't only that, Paula, is it? You have your own lives, you don't want me around."

"Yes, we do, Father, that's just a lot of self-pity."

"Then why have you, what you call neglected me? Not that I'm complaining, of course you can't share your lives with me—for that matter, I can't share mine with yours. We're different generations."

"Good heavens, you talk as if you're our grandfather! You're only fifty-two."

He rose and went to the window, staring out at the garden, cold and sodden in the pouring rain. "Yes, well—that's part of it too, isn't it? I'm fifty-two. You, Ben, you're a man now—"

"Oh, if that's all it is then, why don't you just keep her on as your mistress?"

"She is not my mistress."

"Oh, Father, come off it! She's been your mistress for the past three years, we've all known it."

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"No, she hasn't," he said. "She was—a friend. Your mother knew that, your mother didn't mind my knowing her."

"Didn't mind? So why did she three times try to commit suicide? Three times! And succeeded in the end."

"But, my darling, that wasn't on my account. It all came out, didn't it?—in the coroner's court. She was becoming more and more unbalanced—"

"And who unbalanced her? You and this horrible Albertine of yours."

"It began long before I ever met Albertine Grey. It was what made me turn to her, in fact."

"Ah, so you admit—"

"We were not having an affair, Sally. I did become very close friends with her, perhaps I was in love with her only I tried not to let myself be. Once I was free, I didn't try any more and now—yes, I am."

"Once you were *free*. Of our mother!"

"Darling, be a little merciful! I'm only trying to explain. Your mother was ill when Sally was born, after that I don't think she ever really got well again. All these years—she had these depressions, she got more and more—neurotic, whatever you like to call it—"

"We like to call it unhappy."

"Well, all right, unhappy. But there was nothing to be unhappy about, and if you're unhappy for no reason, well, that's being neurotic. And if you're neurotically unhappy, other people are unhappy too. You make them unhappy. I met Mrs. Grey, she was unhappy too, in the throes of a divorce, we were at a party, we just talked and talked. Then I ran into her again and then I had a particularly bad time and I was so desperate that on the impulse I rang up and asked if I could go and see her. So it grew up. There was nothing wrong in it—in fact, from your mother's point of view it was even an advantage because it gave me the patience and courage to go on."

"Patience and courage to go on—with our mother?"

He turned away from the mournful window, came back to his chair, struggled to explain. "You see, darling—you can't know what it was like. None of you can know. You didn't see it, you were all away, starting new jobs, setting up on your own: you never saw her as she really was, underneath. When you came home on visits, she'd be happy and excited, but that wasn't her usual self. I tried to keep it from you—why should you be miserable too? So I stuck it all

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alone—the tears and the scenes and the so-called attempted suicides."

He was terribly pale, remembering back. A chill line of sweat broke out along his hairline and he looked suddenly old. "Three times, you say. There were half a dozen times more that you've never known about, a dozen if you count in all the threats, the half attempts, the fakes, the scares. You never knew about those, you never knew anything till I told you, before it came out in court. Nobody knows the half of it even now."

"*We* saw nothing—"

"Of course not," he said. "You were children—and anyway it was gradual, it got worse more rapidly in the past year or two and by then you'd all left home. The nights! The nights and nights I sat up watching over her, with the day's work in front of me when the morning came—watching her, talking to her, physically struggling with her. All the lying and pretending, leading a whole false life so that, for her sake, nobody should know."

They were shocked out of their complacency, rather frightened, but they would not let go. "Nobody but dear Albertine? Everything was spilled out to her, you bet, all this—stuff about Mama."

"I had to have somebody to talk to—and somebody your mother didn't know, someone who lived away from her, was best. And if it helped me, well, I've told you—at second hand, it was helping your mother too."

"Perhaps she'd have preferred to be helped some other way—not to have her husband running off spilling all her private affairs to another woman."

"She didn't know that I—told anything about her. She knew that I always kept her secrets safe. And she didn't mind my knowing Albertine, I've told you. I think she was quite pleased. When she was—well, in her happier moments, she realized that life was not too easy for me."

"She couldn't know that the minute she was out of the way you'd rush off and marry the dear lady."

He said patiently, "That's one way of putting it."

"And what do you suppose people are going to think? Her ashes not yet cold in their rotten casket—"

"Oh, Sally darling, I know you grieve," he said.

"—and you come marching home with your new light of love. Six months after your wife committed suicide."

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"They'll probably say that she didn't commit suicide. They'll say he murdered her."

"Oh, Ben!" he said, crying out in agony. "For God's sake!"

"Yes, well—you being in love with another woman and Mother dying like that—"

"Shut up, Ben, that's going too far," said Paula. "That's rotten. Everyone knows how she died, she practically told the cleaning woman, only of course the old girl didn't realize she meant she was going to take an overdose. And Father wasn't even in the house, he found her dead when he came home."

"I'm only saying what people will *say*."

"They could, Papa, you know. People talking gossip don't worry about the facts."

"Charming that will be for *us*," said Paula, "won't it?"

"And for our charming new stepmother. Have you thought about that, Papa?"

No, he had not thought about it. Out of all his agonies, this aspect had never struck him. He said feebly, "I suppose I could wait."

"I thought that was just what you couldn't do? How long are you going to wait for? Two years will still be too soon."

"Two years!" he said. He was hungry for her loving and comforting, it was so long, so long since a woman had been kind to him. And meanwhile, something Puritan within him, something which he himself did not recognize as a sort of—chivalry—kept him from asking her to become his mistress, at least until he could promise her a future marriage. And after all, that wasn't the answer. He needed so much more than that—a wife, a companion, a home. "Two years?"

"Can't you wait a couple of years for your piece of cake?"

"And you needn't think *this* is going to be a piece of cake," said Paula, and her young face took on an obstinate, almost a vicious look. She's in pain, her father thought, she was so heartbroken when her mother died, at the way she died—they were all so heartbroken and shocked. And they're young and—rough. They couldn't understand. "You don't understand," he said.

"Well, *you'd* better understand—because we're not having that woman here, are we, Sally?—are we, Ben? From the day she enters this house, I'll never speak to you again. None of us will ever speak to you again."

"You'd lose us, Father. Of course if you prefer this woman to your own family—"

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"It's for your own good, Father. To save you."

"Because, what sort of a life would you have, living here? All the people who've known you all their lives, known all the family before you—thinking so much of you, thinking so much of Mother—talking behind your back, whispering, discovering that six months after your wife's suicide you'd brought this divorced woman back to Mother's home, our home. Just divorced when you met her, they'll say it was on your account that she was divorced—"

"That's not true."

"They'll think it's true. We won't let you do it, it's for your own sake. And when they realize that now none of your children are on speaking terms with you—well, you couldn't live with it. And neither could she."

He could go away—take her away somewhere, live abroad. But her roots were here in England, her children were here, settled in schools nearby, she would not leave them. And his own roots also were here, even more straitly confined, in this old family house. Besides, to lose his children—! They were cruel now, but only because they couldn't understand, couldn't see beyond their own reactions—could see perhaps more clearly than he the perils ahead. Were cruel to be kind.

Sally was pleading. "Father, we'd help you, we'd support you. We'd come and see you much more, we've been rotten not to. And you can come and see us—when we all get married and have homes, you can stay with us; someday or other we'll be providing you with grandchildren—"

"Sally and I will take cookery lessons, Papa, and see that you always have lots of cake."

"But if that woman—!"

He sat for a long time after they were gone. The years stretched ahead of him, lonely, loveless, no one to be interested, no one to care; no one ever to lie holding him close in her arms. Nothing to do. Nothing to do. All the long years and years of nothing to do. Now, for the rest of the evening, with the darkness closing in—nothing to do. Nothing to do, all over the eternal weekend. Go and see her? But no, it was all no good. If the children could have stood by him, gossip might have flared a little, but would have died. Without them— He couldn't subject her to that.

Compassion, that was the word. Compassion was what the whole world must turn on, mutual compassion, it was all that could get

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you through life. But—they had had no compassion for him. So now there was something that he might as well do because there was nothing left for him and it would be—an easement. They would suffer, but he in his turn need have no compassion for them. It would be, he thought bitterly, almost a sort of revenge. *She* wouldn't suffer—nobody knew about her, and the children would now surely keep their mouths shut, not make everything even worse—

Compassion. Had it been out of compassion that he had done what he'd done? He had truly believed it then. Compassion for the poor, sick, tormented creature, fortifying her death wish by the cunning, secret accumulation of otherwise harmless pills. But had it not rather, now that he faced the fact, been for himself? Worn out, weary, broken-hearted, fighting against that longing to love and be loved again. Well, if that were the secret truth—much good it had done him! If the children had been kind, in other arms he might have found forgetfulness and peace. But the children had not been kind.

Hardly knowing what he did, he rambled out into the kitchen and cut himself a slice of shopmade cake and, still eating it, went back to the telephone and dialed a number. What did that make one?—what crime had one committed?—finding a suicide in the last moments of life, turning away and leaving her to die. Doing nothing to help and save. Just turning away.

"Police? Would you come for me, please?" He gave his name and address and, as though he brushed away guilt, flicked fretfully at the cake-crumbs down the front of his waistcoat. Quack-quack-quack went the voice at the other end of the line, questioning. He said as though surely it must be sufficiently obvious, "Well, I want to confess to having murdered my wife."

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Professor Antonia Nielsen made her first appearance in The Ariadne Clue, *winner this past year of the first Scribner Crime Novel Award. In the novel, ancient Greek literature takes on a disturbing—not to say appalling—relevance to modern life. In this story Antonia foils yet another academic nasty with the help of some potent materials from the remote past.*

Her creator, Carol Clemeau, is also a classics professor and has initiated several startled Latin classes into the mysteries of the ancient Roman cursing-tablets. There, of course, she says, the resemblance ends.

Presenting, without further ado, in her first appearance outside of the award-winning novel, Professor Antonia Nielsen—or, Antonia of the Many Wiles . . .

CURSES

by CAROL CLEMEAU

"Professor Nielsen, are you serious?"

"What I want to know is, do these things work? Because I can think of a *couple* of people—"

"Doesn't it make you kind of nervous, giving an assignment like this? I mean, you being a teacher and all?"

Antonia grinned back at the six members of Latin Historical Prose 403.

"Yes, yes, and no, in that order," she said. "I am invariably serious, as you should know by now. Of course they work—would I waste your time and mine composing curses that didn't even work? And what do I have to be nervous about, universally admired, respected, and beloved as I am?" Antonia then glared ferociously at the six, daring them to deny the universality of the respect and affection she commanded. Two of them giggled.

In the back row, her blonde head resting against the green chalkboard, Jessica Hopewell did not giggle. She was looking, as usual, skeptical and a bit tired. She had apparently dedicated her senior

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year at the university to a pose of blasé world-weariness. This was rather incongruous with what Antonia knew of her in earlier years, but seniors did get into some odd moods as they moved toward the threshold of the Real World.

"The problem with Miss Nielsen," Jessica said, "is to figure out exactly what she's being serious *about* at any given moment. At this particular moment, my guess is she's dead serious about the hortatory subjunctive, or maybe *ut*-clauses with jussive verbs. Whether she's also serious about laying quartan fevers and migraine on people—who knows?"

The class laughed, and Antonia laughed with them. Six years of teaching had convinced her it was not the irreverent students who threatened the effectiveness of a teacher or a class. Those who genuinely feared and distrusted learning typically had a respectful manner and no sense of humor whatever. It was the Jessicas of the academic world, flippant on occasion but fundamentally serious, that made teaching bearable, and occasionally even fun.

"The problem with Miss *Hopewell,*" Antonia said, "is trying to put anything over on her, anything at all. And I thought I'd disguised my true purpose so cunningly, too. Yes, Jessica, you're right, it is an exercise in Latin prose composition. We've read enough curse tablets by now that you ought to be aware of some of the constructions most commonly used in them. The infamous Hortatory Subjunctive, the abominable Jussive Noun Clause, the—"

"But what if we also want them to work?" inquired the irrepressible Jessica.

"I have here," Antonia replied, "six small sheets of lead, the metal of earth." She produced them from her briefcase and handed them out, one to each student.

"Lead, as you know, is the most effective material for our purpose. So if yours doesn't work, Miss Hopewell, I'm afraid we'll have to attribute its failure to your Latin grammar, because the tablet itself is absolutely authentic."

The students fingered the lead curiously. The sheer physicality of the exercise, which Antonia had used with previous classes, always intrigued the students—the heavy, slightly greasy feel of the little metal sheet, and later the drag of the surface against stylus or nail-point as they scratched their laboriously assembled Latin words onto it after they had been approved on paper.

"Aside from using the correct writing material and getting your vocatives and imperatives right, there are a number of other things

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you can do to increase the potency of your curse. Does anyone remember what they are?"

"You can write the whole thing in Greek—Latin words, I mean, but in Greek letters," said a boy in the front row.

"Right," Antonia affirmed. "What else?"

"You can write backwards. Or you can do one of those whatcha-callems—boo-something. The thing that means 'like an ox plowing furrows,' backwards and forwards in alternate lines."

"A boustrophedon, right. But have mercy on my failing eyesight, will you? Those things are murder to read."

"How about a few nice potent symbols?" another student suggested. "The Seven Mystic Vowels—or one of those guys wrapped in chains and serpents. I'm going to have lots of those in my curse."

"Fine, but put them on the *back* of the tablet, please. Otherwise you won't have room for all the Latin I know you're eager to write."

The bell rang, signaling the transition from ten- to eleven-o'clock classes. As the others filed out of the classroom clutching bookbags, notebooks, and clipboards, one of the girls stopped at Antonia's desk.

"Professor Nielsen," she said, "I just had this great idea! It's only three weeks till Hallowe'en, and our sorority always has a Haunted House as our annual fund-raiser. I was thinking that instead of a fortune-teller's booth, we could have a booth for getting a curse to lay on your worst enemy, or a love spell on somebody you're not having any luck with. You *said* that's the way they did it in antiquity. You'd go to a professional to get your curse drawn up properly, like a will or a contract. Get it done right, you said."

"And you think I'd be perfect for the role of the professional? Otherwise known as the witch?"

"Oh, no," protested the girl, "it's just that if *you* wrote the curses you wouldn't have to worry about any atrocities we might commit against the Latin language. The kids wouldn't know the difference, of course, but you'd feel better about it, wouldn't you, Professor?"

"Oh, definitely," said Antonia. "I wouldn't be able to sleep at night if I thought there were improper Passives Periphrastic wandering around loose. I'll think about it, Sandra."

After lunch on Wednesday Antonia settled down to read this year's crop of curses. Two students, predictably, had opted for love charms. "Make her do whatsoever I desire, let her touch no food and go without sleep for love of me, let her freeze and burn with desire for me" was the steamy burden of one. The other was more vindictive

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than amorous: "Let him be as a lump of coal, or a dry stick, or a dead thing, in the eyes of that bitch for whom he left me."

The other four students had composed variations on the cursing formulas they had encountered in the ancient tablets. One boy had enumerated the parts of his victim's body, from eyebrow to toenail, together with a form of mutilation or incapacitation appropriate to each. It made pretty gruesome reading, especially so soon after lunch.

Antonia shifted two nouns from the accusative into the dative case in the last of them, doctored an ailing subjunctive passive, and gave the author a B+.

With a now-for-the-dessert kind of feeling, she turned to Jessica Hopewell's curse.

She had been saving Jessica's paper till last, as she often did. Though not a Classics major—with hard-headed practicality Jessica had opted for Computer Science, in which she was said to be doing brilliantly—she was by far the best Latinist in the class, and reading her papers was a treat.

This one was no exception. Jessica, as usual, had taken a good deal more trouble over the assignment than anyone else in the class.

But aside from its technical correctness, the little exercise was oddly disturbing. Jessica had caught the tone of the ancient tablets almost too well—the mesmeric repetitions and parallelisms, the piling up of verbs of violence, the compulsive reiteration of the victim's name.

The victim. Suddenly Antonia realized what it was about Jessica's curse that had struck her as odd. Other members of the class seemed to have picked the objects of their spells or curses from among their immediate circle of friends and acquaintances—a roommate, a girl friend, in one case a hapless kid brother.

But Jessica—Antonia looked again to be sure, and there it was: *Iasonem Cornelium Giffordum quem peperit Helene.* Jason Cornelius Gifford, son of Helen. More commonly known as Jason C. Gifford, III, son of Gifford Enterprises.

Jake Gifford was currently in his fourth year as what Jessica herself had once called a B.N.O.C., or Bête Noire on Campus. He was widely regarded as having caused more trouble, of more varieties, to more people, in a shorter time, than any other student in the university's long and otherwise distinguished history. He received poor, though just passing, grades in everything. He was ringleader of the most destructive faction of the most antisocial fraternity

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on campus, Gamma Alpha, unaffectionately nicknamed Gifford's Animals. His attitude toward women was often compared to that of Attila the Hun, with Attila's invariably adjudged the more enlightened.

He was also very, very rich. Gifford Hall, which now housed Anthropology and Sociology, had been donated by his grandfather to prevent the expulsion of Jake's father, who had recently endowed an Institute of Ecological Studies to prevent the expulsion of Jake. Endowing things was what Jake liked to refer to as one of his clan's "fine old family traditions."

It was axiomatic with the Giffords that real scandal—that is, scandal unfixable by blandishment, threat, or endowment—was to be strictly avoided as detrimental to the family and corporate image. This circumspection had reference primarily to matters academic and sexual. Naturally it did not extend to petty financial affairs such as fines, damages, and personal debts. Jake therefore had considerable leeway in which to exercise his talent for trouble-making before he felt the tug of the parental tether.

Sexual indiscretion was less of a problem than might be supposed, because nowadays there were barely enough unregenerate masochists among the female half of the student body to keep Jake precariously supplied. Or as Jake himself was said to have put it, "It's a good thing I'm graduating in June, because the quality of the womanhood around here sure has gone to hell."

That Jessica Hopewell was, or had ever been, one of those drawn into Jake's orbit—even briefly—was inconceivable. Yet there was his name, all three of his names, in Jessica's firm hand, in the middle of Jessica's curse.

A joke, perhaps. But as a joke Jessica's paper was feeble, a cheap shot at an obvious target, and Jessica simply didn't have that kind of mind. If she had meant to lampoon the already much-lampooned Jake, no reader of her curse would have been in any doubt about it. She would have zeroed in on his all too well known vices—his arrogance, his lasciviousness, his intellectual dimness. She would have been devastatingly specific, probably indecent, and extremely funny.

But Jessica's curse was not funny. It contained the usual array of violent yet vague verbs (crush . . . break utterly . . . overwhelm and utterly slay . . . strangle . . . bind him, break him), verbs that lacked the sting of personal reference that would have raised them to the level of satire.

Telling herself sternly that all this fruitless conjecture was no

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more than an excuse to put off grading some baby-Greek quizzes, Antonia was about to lay Jessica's paper back on the pile with the others when the last line of the curse caught her eye. *Let my enemy's tongue be mute against me, and powerless. . .*

That too struck Antonia as odd, but she resolutely refused to speculate further and turned to the quizzes.

Twenty minutes later there was a knock on her office door.

Jessica Hopewell was looking even wearier than usual, and this time Antonia thought it was not a pose. She seemed anxious as well as tired. Her left arm, wrapped around an assortment of legal pads and spiralbound notebooks, was stiff with tension. Her right hand was hidden in the pocket of her battered khaki jacket. Antonia would have been willing to bet it was clenched into a tight fist.

"Miss Nielsen?" The girl's voice was wary. "I know this sounds funny, but could I have my paper back? I've written another one." She pulled a sheet hastily out of one of the notebooks and thrust it at Antonia.

As a general rule it was hard enough to elicit *one* paper from a student. To be offered a second as replacement for one that had already been awarded an A was without precedent.

"I'm afraid I don't understand, Jessica," Antonia said. "There was nothing wrong with your first paper. In fact, I gave you an A on it."

Jessica squirmed uncomfortably. "It's just that I had a better idea after I turned that one in."

Antonia looked at her questioningly.

"I changed the—the victim. I mean, Jake Gifford's such a cheap shot. A cliché, practically. I mean people are always doing take-offs and things about him."

Antonia pulled Jessica's paper out of the pile and held it out to her. The girl seized it nervously and stuffed it into a notebook together with the one intended as its replacement.

"A person's got to have *some* standards, in humor if nothing else." She tried unsuccessfully to make it sound like a joke.

"The assignment was to compose a Latin curse, Jessica, not a joke," Antonia said. "And that is what you did. Your paper was not humorous and your last remark was not humorous. Are you ready to tell me whatever it is you're trying so hard not to conceal?"

Antonia's steady gaze was too much for her. Jessica grinned sheepishly and dropped into the chrome-and-vinyl chair which was the only free surface in the cluttered office. For the first time since she

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had entered, Jessica Hopewell looked her usual self. Some internal dam had apparently given way and let out the deviousness and the nervousness that were so unlike her.

"I should just have taken the stupid paper back and kept my mouth shut, right?"

"I gather it's something to do with Jake Gifford?"

"Partly, yes. But I'd better start with the other part, because Jake only comes into it later. It began last May, during exam week. I had four finals in two days, and by the end of the first day I was afraid I wasn't going to make it through the second."

"But with four exams in two days you could have applied for a deferment on one."

"I know, I know. But I'd never done that and I suppose I was trying to prove something. Juniors can get sort of cocky at times, have you noticed? Anyway, by the time I realized I needed a deferment it was too late to ask for one."

Antonia, who had been searching her memory for anything out of the ordinary concerning last spring's exam period, suddenly thought she saw what the girl was leading up to. "Oh, Jessica, you *didn't.*"

"Yes I did, Miss Nielsen. The fourth exam was your Greek final, and I cheated on it—super-detailed cribsheet and all."

"But you'd been getting A's in that course all along!"

"Oh, I knew the material all right, or I would have if I hadn't been so exhausted. I *might* have made it—it was just that I couldn't be sure I would. And I just can't afford that kind of uncertainty, Miss Nielsen."

"Now hold on, Jessica. If every student who wasn't certain of getting an A refused to take exams—"

"Yeah, I know, Miss Nielsen. It seems wrong to me too now, but at the time all I could think of was how stupid it would be to risk everything I'd worked for just because for one moment I'd been too conceited to admit I might need a little extra time to rest and study for my last exam."

"Risk everything?"

Once again Jessica looked sheepish. "Oh, I suppose I was being a little melodramatic. But—there was the Woolrich."

Ah, yes, the Woolrich. Antonia had momentarily forgotten the high-paying, high-prestige, high-pressure Woolrich Fellowship. Awarded only once every four years, it relieved the recipient of all financial anxiety for the last two years of his or her undergraduate

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career and the first two of graduate school, and in this respect was a dream come true for the student and her or his family. But it made correspondingly heavy demands upon the Fellow. Though its provisions were couched in a lot of quasi-legal jargon, what they amounted to was the requirement that the Woolrich Fellow maintain a virtually straight-A average in all courses for all four years.

And Jessica Hopewell was the current Woolrich Fellow. Antonia was beginning to get the picture.

"You cheated on an exam you had a pretty good chance of getting an A on anyway because you were tired and underprepared and even the possibility of a lower grade was more than you could face."

"The loss of the *fellowship* was more than I could face, Miss Nielsen." The girl's voice was much calmer now but deadly serious. "Without that fellowship I wouldn't have been able to study the way I have, without distractions and without squandering my energy on details like staying alive and paying tuition. I wouldn't be the student I am, wouldn't have the graduate-school prospects I have, wouldn't have the same future ahead of me."

Antonia gazed at her for a long moment. Jessica's eyes met hers unflinchingly. "I'm expected to report a thing like this," Antonia said at last.

"Yes, I know," said Jessica. "I think that must be why I came. I wanted it to be you."

"I don't understand."

"You're forgetting Jake."

"Yes, what *does* Jake have to do with this? I assumed that you found him a convenient target for your curse. Surely there's nothing more to it than that?"

"I'm afraid there is, Miss Nielsen. Of course there's nothing 'between' us in the romantic sense. I haven't fallen quite *that* low. But there is a bond of sorts between us."

Jessica seemed to brace herself, clutched her notebooks a little closer, and sat a little straighter in the chrome-and-vinyl chair. "By the time that last exam was over, what with exhaustion and guilt feelings and plain fear, I was feeling pretty spacy. I went staggering back to the dorm, thinking about what to do with the damn cribsheet, and I tripped and fell and dropped everything I was carrying. And suddenly there was Jake looming over me, laughing and making gallant remarks about broads not being as graceful as they used to be. He did help me pick up my books and papers and stuff, but while

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he was doing it he found the cribsheet." She paused and took a deep breath.

"For a long time he just stared at it, with a look like the one I imagine on Mephistopheles' face at the moment he's certain he has Faust in his clutches. Only Jake's face is fatter. Then he folded the paper up and put it in his shirt pocket and walked away without a word."

"But you've heard from him since, I gather."

"Yes, but not for almost four months. It was in early September, a couple of weeks after school started. I was just beginning to hope he'd forgotten about the paper, or never really meant to use it, when he phoned. Most of the rest you can imagine for yourself, I expect."

"He's—blackmailing you." Antonia found it painful even to pronounce the word. The girl nodded miserably. "But what *for?* He's already got more money than he knows what to do with. Surely he's not making like a Victorian melovillain and forcing you to share his loathsome embraces?"

Jessica smiled without much conviction. "No, though I'm sure he's capable of it. There's a certain mad logic to what he *is* getting out of me, though. Some people might even think it was—funny." Jessica almost choked on the last word.

"He's making me do what I do best—write term papers for him. He's a rotten student, and good grades are the one thing his money won't buy him. Oh, I know you can buy term papers out of catalogues, but this is safer, more *individualized* as Jake puts it—and classier. Jake always goes first class."

Antonia was thinking very hard. Finally she said, "Your idea, I take it, is that I should turn you over to the Discipline Committee, which will try you, find you guilty of cheating, and duck you three times in the village pond. Your conscience will thereupon be shriven, and you will also be in a position to wreak a terrible vengeance upon Jake Gifford. Of course, your career will be destroyed, but no doubt that is a small price to pay for revenge and a clear conscience."

Jessica was looking a little dazed, as if the conversation was taking a turn she hadn't anticipated. "You make it sound as if I had some alternative, Miss Nielsen. My only options now, as far as I can see, are to be reported by you, or by Jake. I won't write his damn papers for him, and that's the only thing that would have kept his mouth shut."

"Have you thought about what you'll do to Jake?"

"As soon as they're through with me, I'll haul *him* in front of the

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Discipline Committee and tell them what he tried to do. I'll make damn sure they call it by its rightful name too—blackmail."

"But what evidence do you have, Jessica? Have you actually written any of these infamous papers? Do you have a shred of concrete proof of what he's been up to?"

Antonia had never actually seen anyone go pale with anger before. She let it sink in for a long minute before she continued. "That's an interesting color your face is turning, Jessica, but let's not panic just yet. I think I have an idea."

It took nearly twenty minutes of elucidation, expostulation, and exhortation before Antonia could push the girl gently out the door and aim her in a homeward direction. Jessica Hopewell was still shaking her head in disbelief as she left the Humanities Building, but there was a gleam of purpose in her eye which had not been there when she arrived at Antonia's door.

On days when a major paper is due, the atmosphere in a classroom changes subtly. Those students who have completed the assignment look less alert than usual, having had little or no sleep the night before. Those who have not written the paper look more alert than usual, some hoping to convey the impression that they're really terrifically interested in the subject and their failure to do what they were asked to do was attributable to circumstances beyond their control, others aiming for an air of sophisticated nonchalance indicating that such mundane considerations as deadlines, academic requirements, and the teacher's convenience are below them.

Antonia was familiar with both of these attitudes and their permutations, and as a rule paid little attention to the gradual accumulation of multicolored folders and stapled and paperclipped manuscripts before her. Today, however, was different. She found herself waiting with considerable anxiety for the arrival of one student and one paper in particular.

He arrived at last, tossed a kelly-green celluloid folder onto her desk, and betook himself to his customary place in the far back corner of the lecture hall. There he flopped into a seat with the look of bored insouciance that seldom left his rather petulantly good-looking face.

Antonia breathed more easily and launched into the day's lecture, which was one of her favorites. She called it The Great Cheaters of Greek Mythology.

"The ancient Greeks," she began, "loved a good swindle. You have

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only to recall the gleeful larcenies of the infant god Hermes, the wiles of Odysseus 'renowned among men for his craftiness,' the undetectable thieving of Autolycus, whose name means Lone Wolf—"

The fifty-minute hour passed quickly. When the last student had left, Antonia bundled the term papers into a manageable armload and lugged them to her office. There she riffled hastily through the stack till she came to the green celluloid folder.

She found what she was looking for on page nine. She read it, nodded approvingly, and replaced the paper in the middle of the pile. The faint smile that played about her lips as she leaned back in her chair was by no means one of Christian charity. It partook rather of the pagan notion that an enemy who tries to screw you is a fair target for any retaliation your ingenuity may suggest.

Antonia of the Many Wiles, she thought to herself. That has a nice ring to it.

Four nights later Professor Nielsen appeared on Fraternity Row, walking her big grey Afghan hound, Nike. Although their evening perambulations were a familiar sight around the university, it was unusual to find them on this side of the campus. Their preferred walk centered around the University Museum several blocks to the north where there was more open space for Nike to stretch her legs in.

This evening, however, Nike (who at heart was something of a clown) was at her most businesslike and dignified. She trotted briskly at Antonia's side, looking neither to the right nor to the left, disdaining the enticements of unfamiliar shrubbery and crunchy autumn leaves. She seemed to sense that there was more important business afoot than the mere vulgar investigation of bushes and lampposts.

Antonia herself, though she was doing a fair job of looking relaxed and casual, was beginning to worry. This was the third night in a row they had toured this sector of the campus, and sooner or later someone was bound to ask what they were doing there.

She saw him just as he turned into Fraternity Row from Higginbotham Drive. Tightening her grip on Nike's leash, Antonia strode purposefully toward him.

Jake Gifford was handsome in a fashion-ad sort of way that Antonia found far less attractive than honest homeliness. His massive neck, rugged jaw, and broad shoulders already hinted—at least to the prejudiced observer—of premature flab not far in the future.

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"Mr. Gifford," she said when the distance between them had narrowed to about five yards.

"Evening, Ms. Nielsen." Jake was the kind of sexist who is religious in his use of anti-sexist jargon. "Nice night for a stroll, isn't it?"

Antonia said, "I'd like a word with you, Mr. Gifford."

Jake looked puzzled, but his prep-school manners never faltered. "Sure thing, Ms. Nielsen. Shall I come see you sometime tomorrow?"

"No, Mr. Gifford, I want to talk to you right now."

Antonia fell into step beside him, heading toward the Gamma Alpha house. Jake looked even more puzzled.

"I've been looking over the paper you wrote. Or perhaps I should say the paper you handed in." She paused for a moment to let that sink in. "I was particularly interested in what you had to say on page nine about Hermes as the embodiment of the business ethic." Another pause, this time to watch the expression on Jake's face. The interesting thing was that there was no expression on his face.

"That entire passage, Mr. Gifford, was lifted direct and unaltered from Norman O. Brown's *Hermes the Thief.* There are," Antonia added with relish, "a couple of people on the Discipline Committee at the moment who are absolutely intransigent on the subject of plagiarism."

They had reached the Gamma Alpha house, but Jake Gifford showed no inclination to turn in at the neat white-picket gate. There was no lack of expression now on his blandly handsome countenance. Anger, fear, and frustration struggled for dominance there, though there was no clear victory when finally, through clenched teeth, he said, "I know nothing about any such passages being in my paper."

"I realize that. Still, it's hardly a line of argument you can pursue very far in front of the Discipline Committee, is it? Sooner or later it seems likely that someone on the committee will ask how it's possible that these plagiarized pages could have crept into a paper which you allegedly wrote without your knowledge. And the answer to *that* question would involve you in even hotter water, wouldn't it, Mr. Gifford?"

"Maybe so, *Professor.*" The heir to Gifford Enterprises made it sound like a dirty word. "But someone else'd get scalded along with me."

"That is a dilemma, isn't it?" said Antonia thoughtfully. "Of course," she said, "There is another possibility."

Jake glared at her. "Yeah?" he said sullenly. "Like what?"

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"If a certain piece of property were returned to our mutual friend, I believe I could see my way to overlooking the irregularities in the paper you submitted to me."

"She told you about that?"

"I honestly don't think you have much choice, Mr. Gifford. Given the probable reaction of your esteemed father to a scandal of this mag—"

"I could expose *both* of you, you know!" Jake exploded. "I could destroy you too, *Professor!*"

Antonia had been wondering how long it would take him to figure out that her career, as well as Jessica's and his own, was at stake. "I realize that, Mr. Gifford," she said, "but I don't think you will. Revenge may be sweet, but it is also extremely expensive just now, from your point of view. I'd like your answer, please."

"All right, damn it! I'll bring you the paper first thing tomorrow morning!"

"Not good enough, Mr. Gifford. There are more photocopiers on this campus than telephones. In all probability there's one in every fraternity house. Why do you think I've been skulking about like this for the past three nights? You'll bring it to me now, and here. I'll give you exactly sixty seconds from the time you enter the front door of the Gamma Alpha house to put that paper into my hands. Sixty seconds out of my sight, Mr. Gifford, no more."

"All right," Jake muttered, "I'll get you the goddamn crib. Probably break my goddamn neck doing it, too."

He didn't, of course, even though he made the sprint in and out of the Gamma Alpha house in just under fifty-three seconds. As he turned to leave, after thrusting a rumpled bit of paper at her, Antonia said, "There's just one more thing, Mr. Gifford."

He turned back, scowling.

"I'll be needing a proper Mythology paper from you. I could let you have, let's see—one week to get it in."

"But you said—" Jake protested indignantly.

"I said I would overlook the improprieties of your first paper. I never said I would evaluate that paper as if it were a legitimate piece of work. One has," she added virtuously, "one's professional ethics to think of." Antonia of the Many Wiles smiled sweetly at Jake's purple face.

Pi Epsilon Tau's Haunted House was a great success that year. Something new had been added to the usual creaking coffin lids,

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bloodcurdling shrieks and groans, and disgusting cobwebby things that brushed your cheek in the dark. Two of the sisters, technical theater majors, had concocted a sort of grotto, dimly lit and smoky with incense, its entrance adorned with hand-lettered mottoes:

ANCIENT CURSES
(TABELLAE DEFIXIONUM)

ABSOLUTELY
AUTHENTIC

LOVE CHARMS
ALSO A SPECIALTY

GUARANTEED 100%
EFFECTIVE
OR YOUR DENARII BACK

ZAP YOUR ENEMY
BEFORE
HE/SHE ZAPS YOU!

The interior, as far as one could tell in the prevailing murk, was draped with gauze, spray-can cobwebs, and the lead curse tablets created by Latin 403 and generously loaned (according to another placard) by Professor Antonia Nielsen.

The sorceress who presided over this bizarre little shop was, of course, Jessica Hopewell.

Antonia arrived at the Pi Ep house shortly before midnight, left Nike on the front porch to bask in the attentions of the usual throng of admiring undergraduates, and entered the house. The Cursing Booth was just inside the door and obviously well patronized.

Peering out through the gauze draperies in the mouth of the grotto was the laurel-wreathed head of Jessica Hopewell. Cackling gleefully, the head inquired, "Is there another citizen who desires the services of Domina Canidia? If so, let him step forth and—" Suddenly catching sight of Antonia, the head gave an incongruous giggle and said cheerfully, "Oh, hi, Miss Nielsen! What are you doing here?"

"Could I speak to you for a moment, Domina? I won't keep your clients waiting long."

"Certe, certe," intoned the head, resuming its thaumaturgic character. *"Ini in speluncam meam, obsecro."* An unseen hand swept the drapes aside and Antonia entered.

"What can I do for you?" asked Jessica when they were alone. "Are you having trouble with a dean or something? I can whip you up a *defixio* that will blow him away in no time." Jessica seemed to

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have recovered her normal high spirits rather quickly after her flirtation with professional disaster.

"I'm not a customer, Jessica. I've come—" Antonia glanced around in the classic gesture of melodramatic suspiciousness "—to warn you!"

"Warn me?"

"Yes," Antonia went on in a conspiratorial whisper, "about these curses and spells. You must be *very careful* with them. So much power placed in the hands of one so young—" She shook her head dubiously.

"Miss Nielsen, what are you talking about?"

"Well," said Antonia, "considering what that curse of yours has done to Jake Gifford, I think you must have some sort of affinity for these things and I only hope *I* never get on the wrong side of you."

"What's happened to Jake?"

"The University Clinic is calling it mono. Worst case they've seen in years, they say. But to anyone who's read the Hopewell Curse—isn't that it, hanging over there next to the bunch of garlic?—to anyone who's read it, it's perfectly obvious that what ails the poor boy is *not* mononucleosis."

Jessica smiled and took the little sheet of lead from the hook where it hung amidst bunches of garlic, chicken bones, and aerosol cobwebs. In her Canidia voice she chanted, *"Send him fever and chill, sweats and shiverings quartan, tertian and quotidian . . . let his head pain him, his forehead, his chest, his stomach.* By Hecate, you're right, Miss Nielsen, it *does* sound like mono. But it was you who fulfilled the last part." Her forefinger hunted the words scratched into the lead. *"Let my enemy's tongue be mute against me and powerless to defend him, and let his malice be of no avail against me, and empty."*

JESSICA'S CURSE

Kataxin qui es Egipto magnus daemon, tere contere confringe Iasonem Cornelium Giffordum quem peperit Helene; Trabaxian omnipotens daemon, trade Plutoni praeposito mortuorum et si forte te contempserit et rideat de te et exsultetur tibi vince peroccide eum Iasonem Cornelium Giffordum quem peperit Helene; Nokhthiriph cogens daemon, trade illum febri frigori sudoribus obripilationibus quartanis tertianis cottidianis, et si forte occansionem invenerit praefocato eum in thermis in viis in quocumque loco; Bibirixi for-

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tissime daemon, compedi frange filium canis, et doleat illi caput frons pectus venter; Rikourith agilissime daemon in Egipto, inimici mei lingua adversus me ommutescat nec illum defendere possit, nec valeat malitia illius contra me sed vana sit.

TRANSLATION

Kataxin, who art in Egypt a mighty demon, crush and utterly crush and break utterly Jason Cornelius Gifford whom Helen bore; Trabaxian, demon omnipotent, surrender him to Dis who is set in judgment over the dead, and if perchance he contemn thee and deride thee and make mock of thee, overwhelm and utterly slay Jason Cornelius Gifford whom Helen bore; Nokhthiriph, demon compelling, send him fever and chill, sweats and shiverings quartan, tertian and quotidian, and if perchance he find means of recovery strangle him, in the streets, in the public baths, in whatsoever place; Bibirixi, demon most powerful, bind and break the son of a dog, let his head pain him, his forehead, his chest, his stomach; Rikourith, most nimble of demons in Egypt, let my enemy's tongue be mute against me and powerless to defend him, and let his malice be of no avail against me, and empty.

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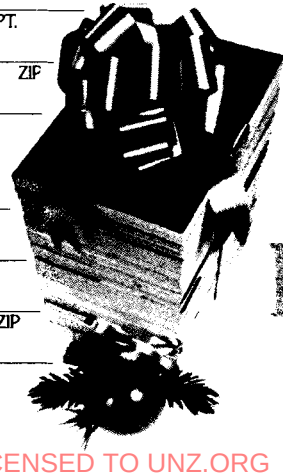

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Partridge Rise had been a neighborly place in the 1930s when its bricks were raw. People knew each other and rather liked the fact. But by the 1980s the newer residents didn't know each other as well, and cared less . . .

CHANGING NEIGHBORHOODS

by JEFFRY SCOTT

The suburbs were his favorite hunting grounds. Their painstaking niceness made it better, somehow. And there was a practical motive: those quiet clean streets led to women alone for more hours than their menfolk were around.

He didn't mind—until ready to let embers of fury burst into lambent flame—that they ignored him.

No, he corrected himself, "ignored" was the wrong word. Ignoring implied a conscious effort. These women looked through and past him automatically. He wasn't dressed to live there, so he wasn't worth seeing.

Fine. When he was ready, when he'd chosen, when the vast aching bubble filled his chest and began pushing laughter out of his throat, then he would be seen. Oh, yes—seen, and the rest.

The women were as bright and smug and seemingly invulnerable as their houses. Only they weren't invulnerable at all. Just as the front doors of the houses could be overcome by the simplest knowledge of locks, or merely a frank smile and a pressing line of talk, the women too were at risk.

One of the first things he did after the hitting was explain that to them. How vulnerable they were, how contemptible—and what he meant to do about it.

Partridge Rise had been a neighborly place in the 1930s when its bricks were raw. People knew each other and rather liked the fact. They swapped recipes and holiday postcards and, looking at each others' babies growing, exclaimed that time flew and that they were all getting older.

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Eventually the babies were the next generation with children of their own, and their parents *were* older, leaving Partridge Rise for retirement homes, geriatric wards, the grave. The newer residents didn't know each other as well. By the 1980s, though still a pleasant place in many ways, the street wasn't the least neighborly. What was known as the old end, half a dozen houses past the sharp turning beside the oak tree that fooled strangers into thinking the Rise ended there, was even more secluded and uncaring than the rest. When Miss Pedder at Number 31—last of the original Partridge Risers—went into the hospital, perhaps three couples living nearby noted the circumstance—and only one of them knew the old lady's name.

It wasn't surprising. Next door to Miss Pedder's was a bungalow owned by a man who'd been divorced, to his great joy, for several years. He used the place as an oversized clothes closet and left-luggage depot between affairs. Next to him lived Mr. and Mrs. Pellew, elderly, mildly mad, slaves to some obscure religion requiring them to rise and retire with the sun, maintain a vegetarian diet, and avoid contact with sinners.

Over the way was a tall, out-of-key Edwardian house, all half timbering and gables and pepperpot towers, that had been there long before Partridge Rise got its name. The house was a jinx—it had been used as a girls' school, a secretarial agency, and a correspondence college, all of which had failed. Now it was being rented on a long lease by a stocky, balding, fierce little man named Dorffmann who was said to be an American and spoke—which he did rarely—with a strong though elusive European accent. He had a large grown family who went off to London on the earliest train every day and came back after dark. Possibly their demands made him testy. Some rumors in the stores a mile away held that he was an inventor who had been cheated and was determined not to let it happen again. Another school of thought knew for a fact that he designed special-effects for Hollywood. Either way, he was self-absorbed.

Next to The Inventor was an empty house being renovated in a desultory fashion on behalf of an absentee landlord. "The old end" was completed by the Misses Dora and Daisy Ingford, who Did Not Pay Visits and much preferred the world to follow suit.

It wouldn't be true to say that nobody noticed that Sally Kyle was living in Miss Pedder's place, because somebody always notices. But they didn't care, or at least not for long. They assumed she was a

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relative keeping the place warm and—if they were cynics—taking inventory of what she would inherit.

Sally Kyle was pretty, but not exceptionally so. Her defeated-looking little car had a sticker on the windshield giving her the right to use the staff park at a big teaching hospital in the Midlands. That figured, for she was a competent young woman.

The postman felt quite sorry for her after the first few days. She waited for him on the doorstep each morning, her intense face falling when all he could offer her was a utilities bill or a piece of Miss Pedder's junk mail—catalogues from stores she hadn't set foot in for a decade, bargain offers of seeds or bulbs for the tiny garden, all grass.

When Dorffmann, The Inventor, called unexpectedly—his phone was out and he needed to make an urgent call—she struck him as a dull and dim creature, exactly the person to rally to the aid of an elderly stricken relative. Dorffmann wasn't the chatty type, but after she had asked him to close a stubborn sash window upstairs and he saw the chilly, scrubbed-and-polished emptiness around her, he felt impelled to sound friendly. "Lonely for you, eh?"

Sally gestured vaguely. "Oh—I suppose. But Auntie should be back by the end of the month. And I've got an exam to study for. It's all right."

Dorffmann told his family, "A vinegar English spinster in the making." And he forgot about Sally Kyle.

She had been trimming the hedge with energy but little skill and now her hand was blistered. Sally gathered the clippings from the sidewalk in a plastic garbage sack and dragged it around to the back of the house.

The view there was not inspiring—a tall creosote fence with rickety double gates. They led to a cinder-surfaced alley behind Partridge Rise. As a girl, Miss Pedder had driven her Baby Morris in this way, but World War II ended all that.

The garbage bin being full, Sally crammed rather a lot of Chinese takeaway cartons and foil trays into the sack with the trimmings, adding several beer cans. She felt concern about leaving signs of drinking. Tied up, the sack looked like a fat crease-faced idol with jauntily pricked ears. Sally blew on the blister. She tried to remember when she'd last been this bored. When she wasn't out shopping, she tended to sit upstairs in Miss Pedder's bedroom, staring out of the window.

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An hour later she was backing the Mini out of Miss Pedder's drive. Workmen were repairing the roof of the empty house, sharply outlined against blue morning sky. They waved and she waved back; a major social encounter.

"Miss! Miss!" The boy came loping over the road, grinning nervously. He was bare-chested, brown, his jeans slipped low on his hips. His eyes had an amber tint, Sally thought, and black ringlets grew low on his brow. A faun—more of a satyr, really.

Getting a mental image of cloven hooves sprouting from the cuffs of his jeans while he capered with Pan-pipes, she smiled. The boy's grin turned closer to a leer and Sally cursed herself. "What is it?" she asked—sounding snooty, to her further irritation.

Three words were enough to abash him. He gulped and ducked his head. "Sorry. But I've run out of cigarettes and they won't let me walk into town and get some. I know it's a liberty, Miss, but if you're going in—"

Before she could answer he was thrusting money at her, greasy coins warm from his pocket.

"All right, I'll buy your cigarettes." Dryly spoken, because she'd been given no option. But the nuance was wasted on him.

"Great! Any sort—I'm dying for a smoke."

"Do you good, it's a rotten habit. Expensive, too—it'll keep you poor." It was her parents' stock argument against smoking, but seeing his sudden change of expression to sulkiness and hurt feelings Sally wished it hadn't popped out.

You shouldn't, she reminded herself, make semi-jokes about poverty to somebody with very little money and less chance of earning more. "I'm a nurse," she explained defensively, "we're supposed to discourage people."

His smile returned, more genuine now. "Too late for me," he claimed. "Ta ever so, lady. George brings a big ol' vacuum flask of tea for us, but he and t'other bloke don't smoke and they couldn't care less if it's killing me." He stepped back to let her drive on. "I'll do you a good turn one day, see if I don't."

Forty feet higher, Stanley Musgrave turned gingerly from his saddle on the roof ridge and watched Sally Kyle drive away. The voices had drawn his attention. He saw the youth wander back to the curb, sit down with his back against a cherry tree, produce a packet of cigarettes, and light one, expelling smoke in a long, somehow jubilant plume.

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"What's his game, then?"

Johnno Viney wiped his sweating face on the shoulder of a red T-shirt bearing the message, THE ROLLING STONES, WORLD'S FINEST ROCK 'N ROLL BAND. A transister radio rode at his hip, the speaker button a permanent pink growth in his right ear. "You what?"

Musgrave gestured him to forget it. Johnno was an idiot, as near as made no difference, but he was an excellent tiler. You couldn't have everything.

Stan Musgrave belonged to a very common section of English society. As a boy he had been a hooligan, as a young man he'd gladly courted trouble with the police before being claimed by National Service and fighting as a rifleman in Korea. These days he nagged his children, said that the younger generation was decadent and the world going to hell, and led a blameless not to mention pompous and busybodyish life.

He descended the ladder heavily and stood over the boy until the yellow eyes flicked up and slid away from his own. "Live here, do you?" Musgrave grunted, knowing the answer.

"What's it to you?"

Stan Musgrave laughed softly. His stubby tar-flecked right hand dropped to the heavy buckle of the belt the Gloucestershire Regiment had issued him in 1951 and he'd never returned. The brass slides and catches were filthier than in those days, but just as sharp. He was seconds away from unlimbering a savage weapon and the youth knew it. He jerked into motion, rising untidily, his back red from the rasping of the tree. "I've done nothing. I'm just killing time, Mister. Think I'd steal your bloody old truck or something?"

"On your bike," said Musgrave. "All right, you haven't got one. Just pretend then, and get yourself off out of here. I'd rather have your room than your company. And don't come back."

The youth stalked down Partridge Rise, anger evident in the way he pulled the grimy sweater over his head as he walked. Once or twice he looked back, swiftly. Musgrave nodded grimly on each occasion.

"Done nothing yet," Stanley Musgrave observed. "Ten to one you're a burglar." He would have lost the bet.

Sally Kyle was changing gear to make the turn by the oak tree when its trunk seemed to split away into the road. She stamped on the brake, her heart leaping.

"Sorry, Miss, I only spotted you at the last moment." The boy's

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hand appeared at the open window. "Could I have my fags? They're making me go downtown after all. Different story when they want something."

"Lord, you frightened the life out of me! Yes, here you are."

"Cheers. 'Bye for now, then." She saw him in the rearview mirror, jogging toward the crossroads, then the road bent and he vanished from sight and mind.

The older workman was standing opposite as she maneuvered past the rather narrow gateway. For a moment she thought he meant to come over, but when she got out of the car he was climbing the ladder again.

Putting the car into the drive next afternoon, Sally Kyle saw the youth outside the empty house. He had one foot on the bottom of the ladder, steadying it, but there was no sign of the other two workmen.

Something surfaced and subsided at the back of her mind, refusing to return.

She went indoors, slipping the chain into its slide, smiling wryly when she found herself doing it. Habit. A good one, too, but not the least needful.

She was putting her purchases on the kitchen table when the knocking began. Not all that loud, but frantically insistent. And the bell rasped and faded because it was old-fashioned and powered by a battery that faded under long assaults.

"What in the world?" she said, going to answer it.

The door jerked up short against the chain. She saw half the boy's face, an eye, a strip of tanned chest with its light bloom of sweat. "Miss! George fell off the ladder! I've got to phone!"

Her fingers were leaden and suddenly twice their size as she fumbled at the chain. "Damn this thing—shut the door and I'll get it." He did and the oblong tongue at the end of the links came out of its slot.

And Sally Kyle thought, The truck!

The workmen came from Kingston-on-Thames, fifteen miles or more away from here. And they weren't great walkers, by any means. She'd smiled the other morning to see the fat, grizzled one solemnly get into the truck, saw at the steering wheel to turn in the fairly confined road, and drive less than a hundred yards to push his football-pools envelope into the mailbox before turning again and driving back.

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The truck hadn't been parked outside the empty house just now. If it wasn't there, then neither were the other two workmen!

The end of the chain fell free.

The boy was at her, hand smacking across her mouth, his other arm like a steel bar grinding into her spine. "You whore, you cow, you'll laugh the other side of your face."

He kicked the door shut.

First he banged her head against the wall in the hall, bellowing with laughter when the vibration made an antique plate fall and shatter, jarred from its place on the picture rail. He didn't push her too hard—he wanted her conscious for a long time yet. "Get upstairs to the bedroom," he told her. "Move!"

She nodded dumbly. "Please—" She stopped, cleared her throat. "Don't hurt me. I'll do everything you say."

That made him laugh again. Somebody had told her, or she had read an article, advising a quiet reasonable tone and no doomed resistance. The fool thought it would make things easier for her.

She walked up the stairs. His heartbeats were filling him now, drumming in his skull.

Sally walked into the bedroom, Miss Pedder's room. The aromas of camphor and mothballs and lavender were overlaid now with the sourness of countless cigarettes. She thought, This isn't happening.

Numbly, she realized she couldn't feel the floor beneath her feet. Her eyes flicked left and right, first to the bed, then to the window, and then to the wall with its sepia reproduction of Landseer (a heap of dead animals, a proud gundog, an arrogant master) in dumb appeals for help.

He stood on the landing. She didn't have a bad figure and already she was plainly sick with fear. And the room made it better, a place crying out to be befouled and abused like the girl herself.

He walked in and the blow was shocking, staggering, in a way distinct from its impact.

Head singing, he fell on one knee, trying to understand how she had done it. She was still six feet away, her drawn face and staring eyes framed by the muslin curtain, her palms pressed against the glass as if all she wanted to do was back away forever.

Then he saw the man who had been standing behind the door, and he did understand. Rolling forward, tucking his head in, he sprang to his feet and reached for the knife and— The revolver was so close

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to his nose that he squinted in the effort to see it properly. He'd never had a gun so near him. It released a fearful inhuman smell of oil and metal.

The man said: "Enough, sonny." At the same moment something hard ground, with no great force, into his right ear.

The other man, with the other gun, said, "I *hate* this little bastard's kind, Pete. I wish—" The muzzle nudged flesh.

"Stop that, you two. You can put those things away."

A third man was in the room. Large, elderly, with a pink face and a nice suit with one of those tiny badges for some business group or other winking in his lapel. The youth gibbered at him, his grimy hands clasped in prayer.

The big man was disgusted. "Sally, are you all right?"

She nodded wordlessly.

"Right. We've wasted enough time."

The youth thought that meant they were to shoot him out of hand. He screamed and fell down, trying to clasp the older man's knees.

The other two picked him up. The man with the pink face spoke slowly yet sharply. "Listen. Go across the landing into that other room—we'll get to you later." With a great surge of relief, the youth realized that it wasn't a sub-machinegun dangling from a strap over the big fellow's paunch. It was a 35mm camera with a long-lens attachment and a huge film magazine balancing the motor-drive unit below.

He stumbled toward the far door gasping for air. His jaw and cheek throbbed from the first man's punch. Hardly daring to form the thought, he realized that once he shut the door behind him he could be out of the window and away. They were only one floor up. And there was a soft landing, the lawn.

He'd spied on Miss Pedder's place almost as carefully as he had spied on Sally Kyle.

Behind him, not getting any meaning from it, he heard a crackle of static from a transmitter-receiver and the elderly man saying, "This is CoForce Leader. Commence Operation Slush. I say again, commence Operation Slush."

The youth opened the door, already mentally halfway out of the window as he turned the handle.

Seven sets of eyes met his when he went in. He had never encountered so many policemen in such a small space.

Superintendent Toxton stood in Miss Pedder's front room, almost

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filling its bay window as he watched Dorffmann being escorted out of the Edwardian house across the road. Behind Dorffmann trooped the man's family who were close and important to him but not really related. Behind them, members of the Combined Crime Squads Force were starting to carry out boxes and crates and filing cabinets.

Toxton exhaled gustily. "Two years of investigation, three weeks watching every move from here, and that little pervert almost wrecks the whole thing! I thought I'd seen everything when Dorffmann came in here that night to check things out and we all had to hide in the blasted broom closet under the stairs!"

Detective-Sergeant Flinders, who had tried to fit his revolver into the youth's eardrum, grinned wolfishly. "I dunno, Skipper. We've got Dorffmann and his team—counterfeit money and forged bearer bonds with a face value of ten million quid—*and* a rapist the Surrey CID's been chasing since last Christmas." He turned, his craggy face genial, and slapped Sally on the back. "You did well, all things considered."

"Watch who you're knocking about, you male chauvinist you," said Police Constable Kyle, thankful the boring assignment was over and she could get back to London.

"Q"

DETECTIVERSE

UNCHECKED BY FAILURE

by S. L. VARNADO

A determined young forger named Fred
Forged a very large check and then said:
"If I should get caught,
I won't give it a thought—
I'll go right on forging ahead."

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a *NEW* Sir Gideon Parrot story by

EDWARD D. HOCH

There were twelve people on the little island off the Devon Coast, not counting the unfortunate guest Jan Litost, the Czech violinist, who had been killed and dumped into the tiger pit in his host's private zoo.

Any resemblance between this fourth story in Mr. Hoch's Gideon Parrot series and a certain novel/play/film of The Golden Age of the Detective Story is strictly intentional . . .

THE CAT AND FIDDLE MURDERS

by EDWARD D. HOCH

The strange chain of events that carried Sir Gideon Parrot and myself to England in the autumn of last year need not be recounted here. Suffice it to say that upon completion of the business at hand we were invited to spend a few days at a little island off the Devon Coast. Our host was to be Archibald Knore, the department-store heir who'd spent ten years and countless thousands of pounds assembling a private zoo for the amusement of himself and his friends.

"How do you happen to know Knore?" I asked Gideon as we made our way across the strip of water that separated the mainland from Placid Island. Knore's was one of the largest department-store chains in Britain, and the invitation to spend a few days in such illustrious company was most impressive.

"I did the man a favor once," Gideon explained. "It's not the sort of favor one mentions in polite conversation, and I doubt if he will do so. He was visiting a young lady of dubious reputation and I

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helped him escape just before her apartment was raided by the police. But this was years ago. I dare say Archibald has settled down now and devotes his full energies to this private zoo of his."

Right on cue there came a loud trumpeting from the island just ahead. The little mail boat bucked in the water as if startled by the noise and I fastened a grip on Gideon's arm. "What was that?"

"Sounded like an elephant to me. We'll see soon enough—there's the dock straight ahead."

I'd expected Archibald Knore himself to be waiting for us at dockside, but although he wasn't there it was no disappointment. In his stead was as lovely a young woman as I'd had the pleasure to meet since leaving New York. She reached down a firm hand to help us onto the dock, then introduced herself with a sunny smile. "I'm Lois Lanchester, Mr. Knore's secretary. Welcome to Placid Island."

"What a nice name for it," Gideon said, bowing to kiss her hand.

She laughed and tossed her mane of yellow hair with one hand. "During the winter storms we sometimes suspect the prior owners chose that name to enhance its value as real estate."

"This is a year-round home, then?" I asked.

She turned, as if noticing me for the first time, and Gideon hurried to introduce me. "Yeah," she said. "Mr. Knore devotes his full time to the zoo these days. The family business is handled by others."

She led the way up to the house, the fit of her designer jeans over her perfectly formed hips snug. When the great house itself came into full view, my gaze was distracted elsewhere. It was a magnificent place, a sprawling English country house that seemed oblivious to its somewhat cramped island setting. And on the lawn to greet us was a strutting peacock, its iridescent tail-feathers erect.

"He's quite a sight," I remarked.

"King Jack is our official greeter. But you'll be seeing more animals soon." As if to confirm her words the trumpet of the distant elephant sounded again.

We entered the house and passed down an oak-paneled corridor to a grimly masculine study where Archibald Knore awaited us. I'd seen newspaper pictures of him once or twice, but they hadn't prepared me for the overwhelming presence of the man himself. He was tall and large without seeming overweight, and his voice seemed to boom across the room. "Sir Gideon! A pleasure to see you again! Come right in!"

He shook my hand vigorously as Gideon introduced me. "He spent a great deal of time in your London store this week," Gideon said.

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Knore smiled broadly. "Spending money, I hope. These animals seem to eat more every year."

"We're anxious to see your zoo," I told him. "But isn't a private zoo unusual these days?"

"No. There are privately owned wildlife habitats in several countries. My friend Gerald Durrell, the author, has a very fine zoo on the island of Jersey. Only government regulation prevents many others from existing. I firmly believe that the task of preserving certain rare species could be carried out much more efficiently in private hands. As long as zoos remain dependent upon public funds, those funds are often the first items to be cut in a budget crunch. The point that feeding people is more important than feeding animals is too easily made."

"Why don't I get you two settled," Lois Lanchester suggested, "and then we can show you around?"

"Do that, Lois," Archibald Knore agreed, "and then bring them back downstairs to meet the other guests for cocktails."

On the way up to our rooms Gideon asked about the other guests. "Mr. Knore often has weekend visitors," Lois said. "This weekend it's a cousin, Bertie Foxe, his wife, and a close friend of theirs, the Czech violinist Jan Litost."

Our adjoining rooms were all we could have desired, with comfortable beds and leaded glass windows looking out on the sea. I was thankful the zoo itself was on the other side of the house where the nocturnal noises of the animals were less likely to disturb our sleep.

We'd barely had time to unpack when Lois Lanchester was tapping on our doors with all the exuberance of a shipboard cruise director. "If you're ready I can give you a quick look at the zoo before cocktails," she told us. "Sylvia Foxe wants to come along too."

"It will be a pleasure," Gideon said. "I've always had a great love for animals."

We met the wife of Knore's cousin in the downstairs hall. She was a tall dark-haired woman dressed in riding britches and leather boots. She had no doubt been pretty once but middle age had turned her face hard and stern. "Are there bridle paths on the island?" I asked after Lois had introduced us.

"No," Sylvia replied. "I simply find this costume more suitable for prowling around the animals. I wouldn't want some little creature taking a bite out of my leg."

"There's no danger of that," Lois told her sweetly.

We left the house by a rear door and followed a covered walkway

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to a low cinder-block building. Already the scent of animals was heavy in the air, but Lois explained that only the smallest creatures and most dangerous species of snake were kept indoors.

Never having been one for snakes, I passed quickly by the glass cages with their traditional tree branch upon which a serpent lay sunning itself beneath the artificial light from above. The lizards I found a bit more interesting, especially when they were in motion. "The temperature is kept at eighty degrees for the reptiles," Lois explained as she walked us through. "Over there is the bird house with its new penguin pond. But let me show you some of the big cats first."

The lions and tigers were kept in large open pits, with plenty of space to roam about and trees for climbing. "In the coldest weather we take them indoors," Lois said.

"Who takes care of the animals?" Gideon Parrot asked, his eyes on a large tiger that seemed to be feasting on its afternoon meal.

"We have a full-time zookeeper on the staff. His name is Taupper. You'll meet him later. He—" She paused, watching the tiger now, along with Gideon. "My God! That looks like a human body in the tiger pit!"

"It most certainly does," Gideon confirmed. "You'd better call for help."

We were above it now, and as the tiger rolled it over with one powerful paw Sylvia Foxe gasped, "It's Jan! It's our friend Jan Litost!"

A burly man in work clothes I took to be the zookeeper came running in answer to Lois's summons. While he was lowering a ladder into the pit Gideon pulled me aside and pointed to a large sheet of paper that had been tacked to a nearby tree. In large childlike letters were printed some familiar words: HIGH DIDDLE, DIDDLE, THE CAT AND THE FIDDLE,

"He was murdered," Archibald Knore said some twenty minutes later. "There's no doubt in my mind."

"Murdered by someone on this island?" Lois Lanchester asked.

We were back at the main house, gathered about the big stone fireplace where cocktails were to have been served. Sylvia Foxe's husband Bertie had joined us, a slender man with thinning hair. "It *can't* be murder," he insisted. "Who on this island could have any possible motive for killing Jan?"

"The back of his skull was crushed," Knore argued. "He was hit

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very hard with a blunt instrument of some sort. And there are spots of blood on the railing surrounding the tiger pit. Someone killed him and dumped him in there. As to who would have a motive, that's for the police to discover."

"Have they been summoned?" Gideon asked.

"I'll do that now."

But his telephone call to the mainland didn't bring the prompt response we desired. The local constable informed Knore that all the boats were tied up with a rescue mission down the coast and with the winds increasing as darkness approached the police helicopter couldn't make the flight over to the island until morning. "Don't touch anything," his voice crackled. "We'll be there first thing in the morning."

Archibald Knore slammed down the telephone. "The old fool! If there's a murderer loose on this island we could all be dead by morning!"

"The winds are picking up outside," Sylvia Foxe said. "It looks like a storm."

"No storm," the zookeeper said. "The animals aren't that restless." It was the first time Peter Taupper had spoken since he'd lifted the body of Jan Litost from the pit. He was a burly, unkempt man with tufts of gray hair protruding from his ears. I wondered if Knore paid him as much as a municipal zoo would, though I had no idea what good public or private zookeepers earned.

At this point Gideon Parrot cleared his throat and the room fell silent. "In the absence of the official police I may be of some service," he announced. "I was invited here as a guest, but Archibald knows I've had some experience in matters of this nature. I propose we take a few moments to examine the facts."

"What facts?" Lois asked.

"Well, if someone on this island is a murderer we need to know exactly how many people are here."

"That's easy," she responded, counting them off on her fingers. "You two, myself, Mr. Knore, Mrs. Knore—"

"Wait a minute," Gideon interrupted. "Is your wife on the island, Archibald?"

"Dora has been crippled for some years now. She never leaves her room."

"I see. Go on, please, Miss Lanchester."

"O.K. Mrs. Knore, Mr. and Mrs. Foxe, Peter Taupper, his assistant

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Milo Lune who also tends to the gardening, and of course the butler, the maid, and the cook. There is also a nurse who tends to Mrs. Knore, but this is her day off."

"Then there are twelve people on the island at the present time, not counting the unfortunate Mr. Litost."

"That's correct."

"Who tends to Mrs. Knore when the nurse is away?"

Knore answered the question. "The maid does. She's quite efficient."

"Mr. and Mrs. Foxe," Gideon said. "You brought the victim to this island. Suppose you tell me a bit about him."

Bertie Foxe snorted. "No one has to be told about Jan Litost. He was one of Europe's foremost violinists—he wasn't yet forty years old! It's a terrible loss to the world of music!"

"Had he a wife? A lover?"

"I believe he was married in his youth, but he'd been alone for many years. We met him in London last season and became fast friends. It was I who suggested he might want to visit Archibald's private zoo."

"When did you arrive?"

"Yesterday afternoon."

Gideon turned to Mrs. Foxe. "And how is it you hadn't viewed the animals until today?"

"I was indisposed when we arrived," Sylvia Foxe explained. "It was a rough crossing by boat just after lunch—my stomach was unprepared for it."

"But your husband and the late Mr. Litost had toured the zoo?"

"I took them around yesterday," Knore volunteered, "and Peter showed them the giraffe and the zebras this morning. They're kept farther out, away from the house."

Another man in work clothes, somewhat younger than Taupper, entered during the conversation. Taupper introduced him to Gideon and me. "This is my assistant, Milo Lune."

The man seemed unusually shy. He rubbed his dirty hands against the legs of his work pants as he answered Gideon's questions. "Did I see Mr. Litost this afternoon? No—well, yes, I think I did spot him strolling by the monkey cages but only at a distance. I didn't speak with him."

"Is something the matter?" Gideon asked. "You seem nervous."

"No, no—it's just I'm worried about the animals is all."

Gideon next produced the crudely printed note he'd discovered

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tacked to the tree. "Did any of you see this before? I found it on a tree near the scene."

"It looks like the work of a child," Lois Lanchester said.

"Are there any children on Placid Island?"

"No."

Archibald Knore came forward to study the message. "A child's nursery rhyme. What does it mean?"

"The cat and the fiddle could refer to the tiger and Jan Litost."

"The rhyme is believed to be a reference to Queen Elizabeth the First," Bertie Foxe said. "I've made a study of nursery rhymes."

"Notice the location of the commas in the message," Gideon said, holding it up again.

HIGH DIDDLE, DIDDLE, THE CAT AND THE FIDDLE,

"What about it?" Lois asked.

"Not many persons would place commas between those two 'diddles,' yet that is the correct version of the rhyme. The person who wrote this was no child. Note too the comma at the end of the line. What does that tell us?"

"That there's more to come," Lois answered quietly.

There was always the possibility of another person on the island, perhaps an escaped convict who'd come out by boat from the mainland and remained hidden back there among the animals. Knore suggested a search party be organized and I readily agreed to be part of it. Gideon, who walked slowly at best, decided to stay behind and question the servants about anything unusual they might have seen.

I found myself with Bertie Foxe, Peter Taupper, and Milo Lune, making a sweep of the far end of the island. There was a dense wooded area here, with only a high fence to indicate the outer limits of the zoo itself. "No one's here," Milo Lune said. "I'm back here a few days a week and nothing's been disturbed. We're wasting our time."

"We should split up," Foxe suggested. "We'd cover the ground much quicker."

The zookeeper, Taupper, agreed readily enough. "Why don't we spread out and keep walking in a counter-clockwise direction? Then meet back at the house?"

I found myself on the far right of the sweep, close to the rocky shoreline with a view of the water. The others were out of sight within minutes and I eyed the setting sun uncertainly, hoping I'd

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make it back before dark. But the island wasn't as large as I'd feared and it took me only a quarter of an hour to circle around, following the shoreline until the big house was in sight once more.

But now there were only three of us.

Taupper's assistant, Milo Lune, was missing.

"Where in hell is he?" Taupper demanded, and tried shouting his name. There was no reply.

"Shall we go back?" Foxe suggested. "It'll be dark soon."

"He'll show up," Taupper said, a bit uncertainly.

We were standing, uncertain of our next move, when a window high in the house opened and Sylvia Foxe's head appeared. "There's someone in the elephant enclosure!" she shouted. "I can see him from here!"

I took a deep breath and followed quickly after the others. When we reached the elephant enclosure I saw at once what Sylvia had spotted from her window. Milo Lune was crumpled near the fence of the enclosure while one of the smaller elephants nudged the body with its trunk. The back of his head was battered and bloody, but I was beyond blaming the injury on an elephant's hoof. I wasn't even surprised a few minutes later when Gideon Parrot joined us and snatched another message off a nearby tree.

"THE COW JUMP'D OVER THE MOON;" he read.

After a dinner eaten quickly in gloomy silence, we gathered in Archibald Knore's study to sort out what few facts we had in our possession. Knore himself had tried to reach the mainland again, but without success. "The phone is dead," he reported. "It may be because of the heavy winds, or—"

"Or the line may have been cut," Sylvia Foxe supplied. "God, we're trapped on this island with a madman!"

"We must all stay together," Knore agreed. He turned toward Gideon Parrot and said, "I think you and your friend had better double up for the night. Bertie and Sylvia will be together and I will be with my wife." He paused, trying to puzzle out the rest of it. "Lois, you'd better share a room with the maid and cook. And, Peter, you can sleep with the butler."

"Old Oakes?" the zookeeper snorted. "He snores so loud he keeps the animals awake! I'll take my chances alone, thanks!"

We'd already been over the timing of Milo Lune's killing and everyone agreed that either Bertie or Peter Taupper could have done it—or even myself, for that matter. But it was just as likely that

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someone from the house, or a hidden stranger, could have surprised him with that terrible blow to the head.

"But how could he let anyone approach him with a club or anything after what happened to Jan Litost?" Lois asked. "It doesn't make sense."

"The killer might have been well hidden and struck before he was seen," Gideon suggested.

"But he'd have to push the body into the elephant enclosure," I pointed out. "With the rest of us in the area, someone would be sure to see him."

"But no one did," Gideon replied. "So apparently it wasn't such a risk, after all." He turned to Sylvia Foxe. "You were watching from your window. Did you see anything?"

She shook her head. "Not until I noticed the body. But I wasn't at the window for very long. I'd just come up from downstairs. I went to see if Bertie was in sight anywhere and I spotted what looked like a body."

Gideon turned to Archibald Knore. "Where were you during this time?"

"Alone here in the study. You certainly can't suspect *me* of killing them!"

"I suspect everyone. It's the only way. In fact, I must ask you the same question, Miss Lanchester."

Lois flushed prettily and stammered a bit. "Well, I—well, I was using one of the upstairs bathrooms. My stomach's been in knots since Jan's body was found. I wasn't feeling well."

"Perfectly understandable," Gideon agreed.

Knore came out from behind his desk. "The killer is no one here. It's some madman who murders whoever he finds alone. Jan and Milo were simply unlucky."

But Gideon shook his head, like a professor correcting a wayward student. "No, they were the intended victims. We know that from the nursery rhyme. The cat was the tiger, and the fiddle was a reference to the violinist, Jan Litost."

"But how," Knore asked, "does this latest message pertain to Lune and the elephants?"

"Lune is the French word for moon, of course. I noticed some smaller elephants in that enclosure." He turned to the zookeeper. "Mr. Taupper, if male elephants are called bulls, what are the females called?"

"Cows," Taupper answered quietly. "Everyone knows that."

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"Thus, the cow jumped over the moon—and crushed his skull while doing it."

"What's the rest of the rhyme?" Bertie Foxe asked after a moment's silence. "Nothing about foxes in it, is there?"

"No," Gideon answered seriously. "In its earliest version the verse reads, High diddle, diddle, The Cat and the Fiddle, The Cow jump'd over the Moon; The little Dog laugh'd To see such Craft, And the Dish ran away with the Spoon."

"You remember all that?" Lois asked.

"During this afternoon's search I looked it up in *The Oxford Dictionary of Nursery Rhymes*. There's a copy in the library."

"Where anyone else could have looked it up too," I observed. "That's how they got the punctuation right."

"Perhaps."

"The little Dog laugh'd To see such Craft," Knore repeated. "I don't see how that can apply to anyone here. And there are no dogs on the island."

"We can't have them," Taupper explained. "They'd upset the animals with their barking."

"Then maybe the chain will be broken," Lois said. "Maybe the killer's work is finished."

Gideon Parrot said nothing. He was staring at a photograph on Knore's desk, obviously a portrait of Knore and his wife when they were much younger. "I think we must speak with Mrs. Knore," he said quietly.

"She knows nothing," Knore protested. "She never leaves her room."

"But things can be seen from a window. Sylvia Foxe saw a body from her window. Your wife might have seen the killer."

Archiblad Knore was silent for a moment. Finally he said, "Very well. You and your friend can see her. But only for a few minutes. I'll take you up."

The upper reaches of the house seemed unusually dark, with only a dim bulb at the top of the stairs to light the way. The maid who'd been sitting with Dora Knore rose as we entered and Archibald dismissed her with a wave of his hand.

The woman in the bed seemed about Knore's age but she was very thin and rather feeble in her gestures. "You've brought me visitors, Archie," she said in a soft voice. "How nice."

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"This is Sir Gideon Parrot, dear. He's investigating the trouble I told you about."

"The killings?"

"Yes."

"Terrible things! We moved here to get away from crime in the cities. After my accident I couldn't walk any more—"

"Might I ask what caused it?" Gideon asked her.

"An auto crash. Archie was driving and the car went off the road. I think he was dozing a bit but I've never blamed him for what happened."

"Mrs. Knore," Gideon began, keeping his voice soft to match hers, "I was wondering if you might have seen anything today from your window at about the time either of those men were killed."

"Oh, no. I never get out of bed. The nurse or Winifred—the maid—tells me what I need to know, which is very little. The weather makes no impact on my life and the animals are Archie's hobby, not mine."

"So you saw or heard nothing?"

"Not a thing."

Her eyes closed for a moment and Knore took that as a signal she was tiring. "That's all," he said.

When we were in the hall Gideon asked, "Wouldn't she be more comfortable in a wheelchair, with the rest of us?"

"No, no," her husband said. "She's fine as she is. She wants it this way."

Back downstairs, plans were again made for the sleeping arrangements. Everyone would be safe through the remainder of the night. And in the morning the police would come.

That, at least, is what we thought.

But in the morning, as Gideon and I were arising before breakfast, Peter Taupper brought news of the latest outrage. The island's only boat had been scuttled at its dock and now lay in eight feet of water. Tacked to one of the mooring posts was the expected message: THE LITTLE DOG LAUGH'D TO SEE SUCH CRAFT,

The telephone was still dead and the winds were still high. We were cut off from the mainland with a killer who showed no sign of stopping.

Over breakfast Archibald Knore said, "At least no one was killed this time."

"No," Lois Lanchester murmured. "Not yet. But there's still one

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line of the nursery rhyme to go." She was helping to serve the breakfast and, taking a sip of Knore's hot porridge with a spoon before she placed the bowl in front of him, she said, "Tastes good."

The Foxes were together at the end of the table, looking unhappy, and Taupper stood in the doorway with a cup of coffee, explaining how he'd happened to find the damaged boat. "I went down to the dock to see if any boats were coming over from the mainland. That's when I saw her sunk in the water. Somebody whacked the side of it with an axe—below the water line, near as I could tell. It was probably done last night, before we all went to bed."

"But what sense does the message make?" Bertie Foxe asked. "I understand that the craft refers to the boat, but there's still no dog on the island."

"Nor anyone whose name sounds like dog," Sylvia chimed in.

Knore looked unhappy. "My wife Dora. *Dora* and *dog* start with the same two letters, but that's a bit farfetched."

"It certainly is," Lois agreed. "Your wife is the one person on the island who *can't* be involved. She never leaves her *room.*"

"It's obvious the killer intends to complete the verse," Gideon said. "It's important that we anticipate his actions and beat him to it."

"What is it? *And the Dish ran away with the Spoon?* What could that possibly mean?" I asked.

"I think we're worrying needlessly," Taupper said. "As soon as the winds die down, the helicopter will be over from the mainland."

"Can the boat be repaired?" Knore asked.

"Certainly. Anything can be repaired."

"Can it be repaired by you?"

"I think so. I can patch it and pump out the water."

"Then do it, man! Quickly!"

Sylvia Foxe cleared her throat. "Might I suggest that someone should go with him? If he's down there alone the killer might get ideas."

"Good thinking," her husband said.

"Lois, how about you?" Sylvia suggested. "Or would you rather I go?"

Lois Lanchester finished her morning coffee and stubbed out her cigarette. "I'll be glad to go, but I don't know that I'll be of much help. What say, Peter? Do you need me?"

Taupper grinned. "You can hold my tools. Come along."

After they'd left, Gideon and I went for a walk outside. The unsettled weather had made the animals restless, and the camels shied

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away as we approached their pen. Over beyond it the zoo's young giraffe was romping in the tall grass and two zebras grazed nearby. "A peaceful place," Gideon said. "The peaceable kingdom—even with a killer loose."

"Gideon," I said, "I've got a theory. Suppose the animals really did kill Litost and Lune. Suppose those crazy notes were written afterward by Taupper to protect his precious animals."

"An interesting theory, but hardly a practical one. The rhyme doesn't fit the events perfectly, but there is some connection. It could hardly have been a spur-of-the-moment idea in the first case, and the coincidence of a second killing accidentally fitting the pattern is out of the question."

"What now?"

He'd turned to stare up at the great old house. "I think we should speak to Bertie Foxe."

We found Bertie and his wife upstairs in their room where they'd gone after breakfast. It was a big sunny bedroom, larger than the one Gideon and I were now sharing but similarly furnished. Bertie sat on the bed smoking while Sylvia stared out the window at the animals.

"I want to know more about Jan Litost," Gideon said. "He was the first victim and the key to this puzzle must lie with him."

"Jan was extremely talented," Bertie Foxe said, taking a long drag on his cigarette. "We'd been friends for years and it seemed a natural thing to accept Archibald's kind invitation to visit the zoo after the London concert."

"Did the three of you travel together frequently?"

"Quite frequently," Sylvia answered from the window.

"You'll forgive me but I must ask this next question. Was there any sort of romantic involvement between yourself and Jan, Mrs. Foxe, which might have made your husband jealous?"

"See here!" Bertie barked, jumping to his feet.

But Sylvia answered calmly, "Certainly not. Bertie and I are happily married and always have been."

"There was nothing between them!" Bertie growled, stepping forward. "Take your dirty little thoughts elsewhere, Parrot!"

Gideon walked to the window and stared out across the tiled roof of the zoo building. He seemed to be looking at the tops of the elephants' heads, barely visible in their enclosure, as he said, "We're all like those animals at times. We meet, and mate, and sometimes

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kill. It's human nature, or the animal side of human nature, for the males to clash over a female—"

His words were interrupted by a sharp scream from somewhere downstairs.

"Come on!" I shouted, breaking for the door.

We found Archibald Knore at the foot of the stairs, holding onto the maid, Winifred. "What is it?" Gideon demanded as we hurried down to join them.

"I lost my head," Knore muttered, releasing the girl at once. "I was questioning her and she told me a lie. When I grabbed her she screamed."

"A lie about what?"

Winifred was sobbing softly. "He accused me of wantin' to run off with Mr. Oakes, the butler. I never would do a thing like that, sir."

"They've been carrying on behind my back. I know they have!"

"*And the Dish ran away with the Spoon,*" Gideon quoted. "You thought it referred to your butler and maid."

"What else could it refer to?" Knore said. "They did it and now they're going to run off."

"You think the butler did it?" I asked in amazement.

"You have books on nursery rhymes in the library. Let's check them," Gideon suggested to Knore, "and let this young woman be about her work."

The library, next to Knore's study, was a pleasant room with books reaching from floor to ceiling and the odor of leather bindings in the air. It took Gideon only a few moments' search to find what he sought. "See here—the same theory that links the rhyme to Queen Elizabeth says that the Dish was a courtier honored by being assigned to carry golden dishes into the state dining room."

"A butler, in other words," Knore insisted.

"Or a custodian of something valuable, at least. And the Spoon was a beautiful young woman at court who was taster at the royal meals, insuring that the king or queen had not been poisoned."

"I know all that," Knore grumbled. "It still adds up to butler and maid in this household."

"If you'll pardon me," said Gideon, "the maid, Winifred, could hardly be described as beautiful. And the duties of taster seem more closely to resemble your secretary, Lois. In fact, I saw her taste the breakfast porridge just a few minutes ago."

"That's right!" I agreed.

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"Lois?" Knore repeated, frowning with puzzlement.

The Foxes had come back downstairs, and as we left the library I saw Sylvia emerge from the kitchen carrying a rolled-up newspaper in her gloved hand. "I'm going outside for a little reading," she said. "Call me if anything happens, Bertie."

Bertie Foxe grunted and said to us, "How do you suppose Taupper's coming along with the boat repairs?"

"Want me to take a look?" I said. But Gideon ignored the question. His mind was still on the problem of the rhyme.

"If the Spoon referred to Lois Lanchester, couldn't the Plate refer not to the butler but to the custodian of your most valuable property, Archibald?"

Knore looked puzzled. "I have no gold."

"The animals, man! Peter Taupper is the custodian of your animals! He is the Plate of the rhyme!"

"Taupper and Lois?" I asked. "You think they're running away together?"

"That's the only way the rhyme can work out," Gideon answered grimly. "Come quickly—there's not a moment to lose."

He led the way, with Knore, Bertie, and me following along. We hurried out of the house and down the path toward the boat dock. I was vaguely aware that the morning's strong winds had let up, but right now we were concerned with more important matters than the weather.

It was the note that stopped us, at the final turn before the boat landing. It had been tacked to a tree like the others, and it read: AND THE DISH RAN AWAY WITH THE SPOON. This time the period was firmly in place at the end of the line. A finish had been reached.

"We're too late," I said.

"Maybe not!" Gideon plunged on and I followed, outdistancing the others.

The first thing we saw was Peter Taupper's body sprawled by the dock, and then Lois struggling with Sylvia Foxe. Sylvia's newspaper lay near Taupper. As Gideon and I hurried to pull them apart I said, "What happened? Did Sylvia come upon them as they were about to get away?"

"That's what it was," Sylvia gasped, struggling in my grip. "Turn me loose!"

But Gideon cautioned, "Hang onto her! She was about to add two

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more victims to her list! Sylvia Foxe is our nursery-rhyme murderess!"

Peter Taupper had only been stunned by the blow, and he and Lois were able to confirm the attack by Sylvia. She'd used the rolled-up newspaper, which she had soaked in water and put into the kitchen freezer until it froze into a club of ice. The victims never suspected a thing when they saw her walking toward them with a newspaper. All she needed was a reasonable amount of strength behind that ice club to crush their skulls. And the weapon could be dropped anywhere unnoticed.

"I *saw* her coming out of the kitchen with the paper," I confirmed. "But why did she want to kill them all?"

"I expect Bertie can tell us about the first murder," Gideon said.

Bertie Foxe hung his head. "I always suspected Jan was having an affair with my wife. I spoke to him about it back in London, man to man, and I had the impression he was going to break it off."

"I imagine he tried to," Gideon agreed. "That's why she killed him. Then when she saw Milo Lune working nearby she must have feared he'd seen her. So he had to die too. The fact that Litost was a violinist and Lune's name means 'moon' must have suggested the nursery rhyme to her as a means of putting us off the track. But in truth it put us *on* the track. In the original rhyme and in her messages, there are eight words beginning with capital letters besides the first word in each line. There are Cat, Fiddle, Cow, Moon, Dog, Craft, Dish, and Spoon. She gave each one the meaning of a person, animal, or thing. Cat was the tiger, Fiddle was Litost, Cow was the female elephant, Moon was Lune, Craft was the sunken boat, Dish was Taupper, for reasons I've explained, and Spoon was Lois."

"What about Dog?" I asked.

"It was a clue to her own identity. A fox is indeed a member of the dog family, and when no other meaning presented itself I saw what she meant—*The little Dog laughed,* just as Sylvia Foxe herself must have laughed when the boat sank."

"She was going to kill Taupper and Lois just to finish the rhyme?" Knore asked.

"I imagine she would have weighted their bodies and pushed them off the dock. If they had seemed to run away, as in the rhyme, we would have blamed them for the prior killings."

Lois Lanchester still couldn't believe it. "And you knew all this

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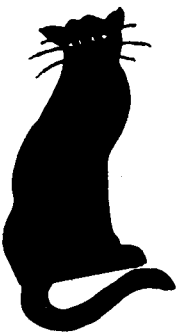
just because a fox is a member of the dog family? Why couldn't the killer have been Bertie Foxe instead of Sylvia?"

"There were other things," Gideon admitted. "It was Sylvia who persuaded you to accompany Taupper to the dock, where she could kill you both. And remember yesterday when Sylvia called down from her window that she saw Lune's body up against the fence in the elephant enclosure? When I stood at that same window this morning I could barely see the tops of the elephants' heads. The zoo building blocked the view. She could only have known about the body if she'd put it there herself a few minutes earlier."

There was a throbbing in the sky and we looked up to see the police helicopter coming in for a landing. Out beyond the big house one of the elephants trumpeted a greeting.



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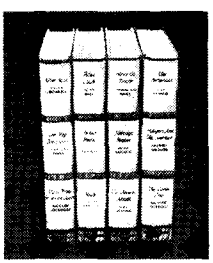

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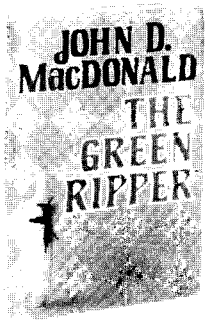

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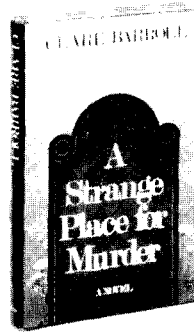

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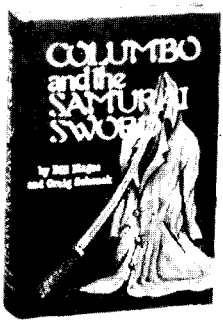

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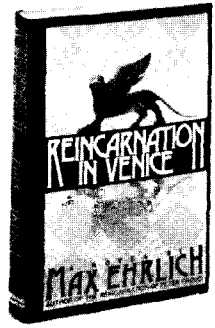

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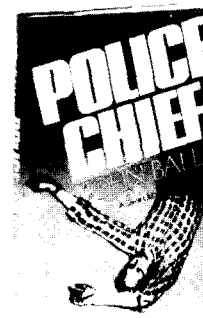

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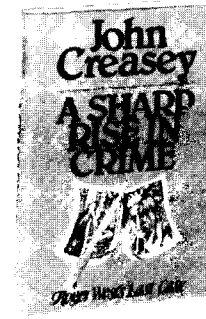

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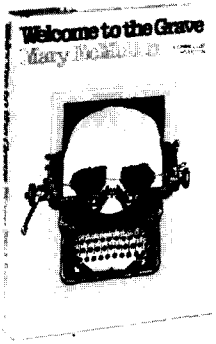

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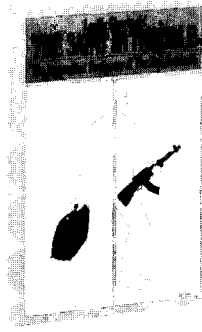

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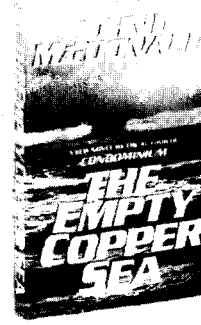

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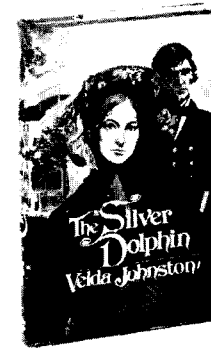

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